

SHAKESPEARE'S POLITICAL ATTITUDE  
TOWARD THE COMMON PEOPLE AS  
PORTRAYED IN HIS HISTORY PLAYS

BY

JOHN C. FOLEY

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

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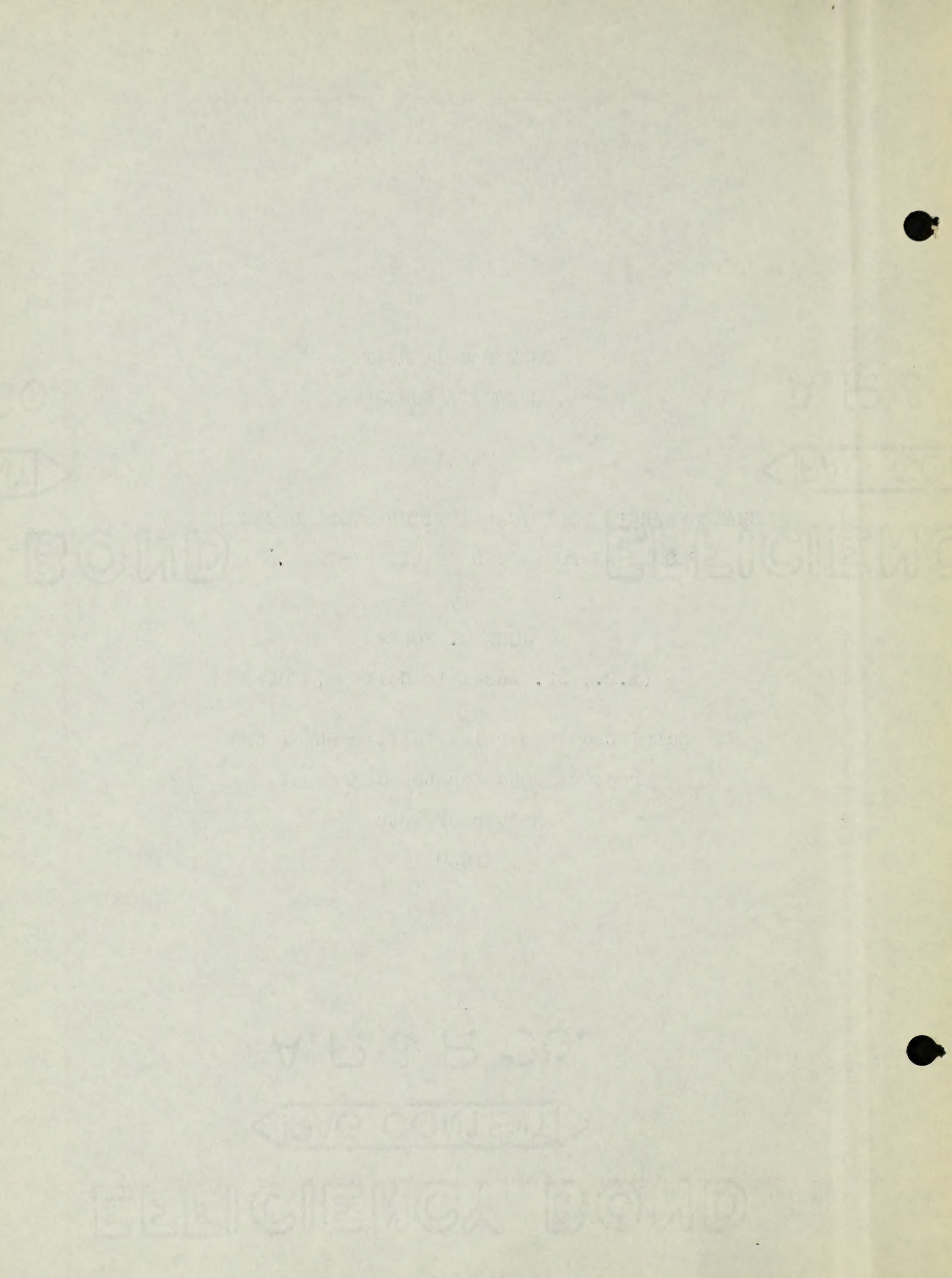
by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

1949





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## INTRODUCTION

The principles of order, degree, and unitary sovereignty have a long history extending back through mediaeval and classic periods. The Renaissance way of thinking about certain problems of state and society represents the concept which greatly influenced Shakespeare's own thinking. It represents also the idea most widely prevalent and generally accepted in his day by the majority of his contemporaries.

The state is presented as a stratified, integrated, political society in which all the parts function for the welfare of the whole. In this divinely ordained social and political structure, vocationally determined degrees of different import function coordinately. This political society might well be classified as a human machine in which each separate part contributes its quota to the general efficiency, and it may at any one time be thrown out of gear by the failure of one part to perform its allotted functions.

The most important single feature of this structure is perhaps the authority which governs and controls it. The king is considered God's duly appointed representative here upon earth. Obedience to the king is a fundamental requisite.

In the idea it embodies this work shows an organization of civil society within which a ruler, such as Coriolanus, and a subject people, such as the mob, must function.

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For Shakespeare there arises a political issue whenever an individual is required to adjust himself to the practical necessities of his position in a kingdom.

Almost every kind of man to be met with in public life is to be found in these plays. There is, however, never any prejudice in the dramatist's handling of these men. He gives us the historical facts as he found them; for his great interest was in human nature. He was immune from political bias. We shall find, as we study his historical plays, that no preference for one man over another mars the equity of his presentation.

In presenting the common man in these history plays Shakespeare is more concerned with him as a member of a group rather than as a person individually distinct. That is to say, it is the crowd which turns from Caesar to Brutus to Antony, the plebeians who listen to Menenius Agrippa, the citizens subjected to the rule of Richard III, the rebels who follow Cade, the common soldiers at Agincourt--in short, the people whose collective voice or person is a loud or silent participant in the play.

Any consideration of the dramatic significance of these historical plays must begin with a clear understanding of the theory of the state. This concept not only is a key to the interpretation of the plays but also is a solution to the dramatic problems. Shakespeare's expression may be clarified if it is studied in the light of the theories of state

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prevalent in sixteenth century political thought.

In this thesis I have intentionally used Shakespeare's English history plays as well as the Roman to show that in these history plays, regardless of kind, Shakespeare was concerned with the principle of order and degree and that the actions of his characters, English or Roman as the case may be, were viewed in the light of this sixteenth century thought idiom. It is essential that we realize this concept influenced Shakespeare's thinking as regards the history plays dealing with his own country as well as other countries.

I was little concerned with chronology in the arrangement of these history plays. I felt that the English history plays should come first, since they are representative of Shakespeare's own country, but primarily I was concerned with the order of importance (from least to most important) in so far as this subject is concerned and an arrangement which would give me a fitting climax. I found this in Coriolanus. This is the reason Julius Caesar appears before Coriolanus, though I often refer to the latter within the first three chapters.

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## I. Theory Underlying Shakespeare's Political Attitude

The rule which the Tudors established in their realm aroused great interest in and an extensive development of political theory. Henry VII because of the ravages resulting from one hundred years of civil war created in England as a "stopper" an absolutism unparalleled in English history. This absolutism was fostered and nurtured by his son, Henry VIII, who added supremacy in church affairs to the powers of the crown. These gains were maintained under Elizabeth. "Principally from attempts to justify or assail the policies of the Tudors arose the large body of sixteenth century political theory," says James Phillips, Jr.<sup>1</sup>

Phillips states that the major portion of the writings in this period was concerned with the governor, his position, authority, and duties. Such were the writings of the Tudor proponents as well as their adversaries, the Jesuit and Calvinist advocates of limited, elective monarchy. Literature on the education of princes such as Erasmus' The Education of a Christian Prince (1516) and The Boke Named the Governour (1531) by Elyot were also common at this time. These political documents, which attempt to portray an ideal common-

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wealth, deal primarily with the state as a whole.

Phillips believes that this Renaissance political literature presented "the state as a structure established by God or by natural reason, designed for the common good of all its members, governed by a sovereign authority, and composed of functionally determined ranks and degrees, each of which, performing its appointed task, contributed to the welfare of the whole."<sup>2</sup> In this there exists a definite similarity of thought between Phillips and Tillyard.<sup>3</sup> It would seem that the majority of theorists accept this general pattern of the state, though disagreement does occur in their conclusions. Almost unanimously they acknowledge monarchy as essential to the structure of the state, obedience as essential to its successful operation, and common justice as its aim and purpose.

Tillyard, Phillips, Allen, and Lily Campbell agree that the arguments for the unlimited and hereditary authority of kings and for passive obedience by subjects constitute by far the largest part of Tudor political expression. Because of the support it gave to the government this type of political argument was encouraged and adopted by established authority. The doctrines of absolutism were widely promulgated not only in political treatises, but in sermons, plays, and histories. Thus this political attitude became the most popular of all

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2. Ibid., p. 20.

3. E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, p. 11 ff.

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The following information was obtained from a review of the records of the Information Board for the period from January 1, 1961, to December 31, 1961. The information is presented in the form of a summary of the Board's activities during the year. The Board's primary function is to provide information to the public regarding the activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Justice. The Board's activities are divided into three main categories: (1) the Board's response to public inquiries, (2) the Board's participation in public hearings, and (3) the Board's publication of information. The Board's response to public inquiries is the most significant of its activities. During the year, the Board received a total of 1,234 inquiries from the public. Of these, 876 were answered by the Board, and 358 were referred to the appropriate agency for response. The Board's participation in public hearings is also a significant activity. During the year, the Board participated in a total of 15 public hearings. The Board's publication of information is the least significant of its activities. During the year, the Board published a total of 12 reports and 15 press releases. The Board's activities during the year were carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, which was enacted in July 1961. The Board's activities during the year were carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, which was enacted in July 1961.

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The above concept of society found expression in works such as the Dialogue between Cardinal Pole and Thomas Lupset (ca. 1538) by Thomas Starkey and The Way to Wealth (1550) by Robert Crowley. All of these works, says Phillips, appeared before the mid-century mark.<sup>4</sup> Both these men discussed the principles and ideals of civil organization in terms of institutions and problems actually present in sixteenth century England.

As Professor Allen points out, their principles and ideals were a heritage of medieval, social, and political thought. "It is true to say that under Henry VIII and Edward VI, there was formed a conception of what the commonwealth should be, or, if you like to put it so, of what it really is. It would be more fully true to say that medieval conceptions received at that time a fresh expression. The writers who furnished that expression were, in the main, reproducing medieval conceptions of the meaning and purpose of the social and political order, and of the duty of every man in his station to see to it that his activities were strictly related to that end."<sup>5</sup>

These doctrines found in Starkey<sup>6</sup> and others dealt with the organization of society according to classes, the

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4. Phillips, op. cit., p. 22.

5. J.W. Allen, History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century, p. 134.

6. Ibid., p. 138.

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4. Phillips, op. cit., p. 25.  
5. J.W. Allen, History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century, p. 130.  
6. Ibid., p. 138.



obedience which each class should pay to those above, and the functioning of each class.

"Monarchy," says Phillips, "as a form of government..., was accepted at this time without much argument, although Crowley and Starkey differed, as did the proponents of absolutism and limited monarchy respectively, in the source scope of the governing authority." <sup>7</sup> Crowley asserts that the ruler is appointed by God and is responsible to none but Him. Starkey, on the other hand, maintains a ruler is subject to the will of those whom he governs, and may be disposed by them when he fails to govern justly according to the laws of his realm. <sup>8</sup> Later writers varied somewhat from Starkey and Crowley by writing of the relative advantages of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy.

Simon Grynaeus, a writer in England during the Reformation, believed that the great lesson of history was that the providence of God governs over all. <sup>9</sup>

These works construct a pattern of political organization similar to the state-concept which appeared throughout English political thinking in the sixteenth century. "For," says Phillips, "it was in relation to the welfare and maintenance of political society as so conceived that theorists on the individual political problems of ruler, subject, law, church,

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7. Phillips, op. cit., p. 23.

8. Ibid., p. 23, n. 11.

9. L. B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Histories, p. 39.





rebellion and the like were developed and evaluated." <sup>10</sup> He cites as examples Elyot's work on the education of a prince, the Homily of 1571 on obedience and rebellion, the works of Parsons, Wentworth, Haywood, Craig, and others. <sup>11</sup>

Phillips believes that the principles of absolutism and obedience were primarily the product of struggles for supremacy between secular and ecclesiastical power and had their immediate origins in the medieval clash between papacy and empire. <sup>12</sup> The Reformation intensified the quarrel and provided the stimulus for further elaboration of royal authority in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters as well as secular.

About 1580 through Jean Bodin, a French theorist, the principles of absolutism were amplified into a well-developed body of political theory. His influence was immediately manifested in England, Allen pointed out, by such Elizabethan treatises as Merbury's A Briefe Discourse of Royall Monarchie (1581), Wentworth's A Pithie to Her Majestie... (1598) and others. <sup>13</sup>

Occasionally a sovereign claiming unrestricted authority met with minor opposition designed to protect their rights and limit the sovereign's power. From such circumstances rose the adherents of restricted monarchy, popular sovereignty, and

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10. Phillips, op. cit., p. 24.

11. Ibid., p. 24.

12. Ibid., p. 25.

13. Allen, op. cit., p. 185.

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the right of rebellion which represent the Jesuit and Presbyterian attitudes toward Tudor political problems.

Catholic and Protestant groups of the sixteenth century developed political theories which conform with the above, in an attempt to resist royally imposed creeds and churches. Their theories at first differed slightly, but they reached similar conclusions by the end of the century. In short, they believed that rulers were representatives of the people by way of contract. Once the said ruler broke the laws of God, of nature, or of the state in effect it was a breach of contract and he was liable to removal and replacement by another.

All, however, absolutists and opponents alike, agreed that monarchy was the form of government best suited to the state. The Calvinists and Jesuits stressed order and degree and monarchy as a form of government as strongly as did the absolutists. Knox, in his First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women (1558), reiterates ideas found frequently in his political arguments, when he describes the order of degrees and vocations which constitutes a political society, and draws a vivid analogy between the body of the state, and the body of the individual man. The Jesuit Robert Parsons held similar convictions.<sup>14</sup> Thus they did not reject the essential order of the state, but believed in limitation of the power of the king.

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14. Phillips, op. cit., p. 28.

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Meanwhile the writers of "institutions" were expounding a concept of the state similar to that discussed above. They emphasize the nature and function of an ideal prince and likewise define in detail the character and conduct of a tyrant.

Through the advice of Sir Thomas More, Erasmus sent a copy of The Education of a Christian Prince (1516) to Henry VIII. This work was followed by The Boke Named the Governour (1531) of Sir Thomas Elyot and Il Cortegiano (1528) by Castiglione. As a result of the popularity of the three, they became an important source of ideals of kingship in England. George More's Principles for Young Princes... (1611), and Francis Bacon's XVI Propositions Concerning the Raigh and Government of a King (1647) are later examples of political treatises which carry on the traditions and ideals established by the "institution." The body politic which they describe is a stratified society controlled by one sovereign ruler.

In their insistence on vocation, order, and degree, and monarchy, these political ideals found in the treatises reveal their fundamental similarity to the concept of the state which is basic in the majority of Tudor politics.<sup>15</sup>

The realist Machiavelli drew in The Prince (1513) no such ideal picture of the state, but he supported the monarchic concept basic to Tudor theories of the state by his insistence on a strong ruler obligated to keep subjects in their proper

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15. Ibid., p. 31.





places. He advocated force, if necessary, to keep human nature in line. His influence, however, Phillips believes to be slight.<sup>16</sup>

As the common concern of practically all schools of thought, therefore, the concept of the state received its share of the attention devoted to political theory in the sixteenth century.

There were certain notions concerning society that were very widespread in the sixteenth century, and these notions were prevalent not only in England but existed everywhere.<sup>17</sup> Political society is pictured as a stratified body with various steps or degrees or classes of men, determined by merit and vocation, ruled over by a sovereign controlling authority, and working in harmony and concord for the welfare of the whole organization. Proper functioning of all parts will produce the desired results. By way of pamphlets, sermons, and treatises this concept came to occupy the top position in Renaissance thinking.

What is the significance of the terms "order" and "degree?" In the sixteenth century order was recognized as the foundation of human society. Such order could not exist, theorists argued, without the differences of degree. "In every aspect of creation these grades and ranks could be observed. Hath not God set degrees and astates in all his glorious

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16. Ibid., p. 32.

17. Allen, op. cit., p. 135.





warkes?" 18

An accurate version of Shakespeare's order and degree is found in Ulysses' speech in Troilus and Cressida(1602):

And therefore is the glorious planet Sol  
In noble eminence enthron'd and spher'd  
Admidst the other; whose med'cinable eye  
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil  
... but when the planets  
In evil mixture to disorder wander,  
What plagues..., what mutiny...  
Commotion in the winds,...horrors  
Divert and crack, rend...  
The unity and married calm of states  
Quite from their fixture! O! when degree  
is shak'd,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs  
...  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark! what discord follows;  
...  
Force should be right; or rather, right  
and wrong--...  
Then everything includes itself in power...  
This chaos when degree is suffocate,  
Follows the choking...  
The general's disdain'd  
By him one step below, he by the next... 19

The implications here go beyond practical politics. Through these words we see that two orders, one the duplicate of the other, exist in the heavens and on the earth; that disorder in the heavens breeds disorder on earth. We see that harmony makes the world go round.

The Elizabethan conception of world-order was that the universe was a unity, in which everything had its place, and it was the perfect work of God. Any imperfection was the work of man.

18. Phillips, op. cit., p. 78.

19. The Oxford Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, I,iii,89-130.

An accurate version of Shakespeare's order and degree is

found in his speech in *Troilus and Cressida* (1502):

And therefore is the glorious planet Jove  
In noble eminence enthron'd and peer'd  
Abdrest the other: whose god-like eye  
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,  
... but when the planets  
In evil mixture to disorder wander,  
What plagues... what murders...  
Comotion in the winds... horrors  
Diver and crack, rend...  
The unity and married calm of states  
Quite from their fixtures! When degrees  
Is scale'd,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs  
Takes but degrees away, nature that stays,  
And, mark! what discord follows;  
Force should be right; or rather, right  
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18. Phillips, op. cit., p. 78.  
19. The Oxford Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 70-117.



The idea of order appeared to the Elizabethans in three different fashions. First as a chain, says Tillyard, "Creation was a series of beings stretching from the lowest objects up to the archangel..."<sup>20</sup> The ascent was gradual. As Sir John Fortescue of the fifteenth century shows us: "In this order angel is set over angel,...man is set over man...God created as many different kinds of things as he did creatures, so that there is no creature which does not differ in some respect from all other creatures, and by which it is in some respect superior or inferior to all the rest...it is impious to think that he left unregulated the human race."<sup>21</sup>

It would be well for all of us, reared on doctrines of democratic equality, to understand clearly here if we are to appreciate Renaissance political theory and the character of the state, that their concept of political society is based on the assumption that all men are not created equal. Sixteenth century theorists believed (as evidenced in Elyot's arguments<sup>22</sup>) that men are endowed with abilities and powers which vary with the individual and determine his rank in the social and political scheme of things. "To have all degrees alike, and no inequalities, how inconvenient," remarks a commentator in the Holinshed version of Cheke's Hurt of Sedicion (1549).<sup>23</sup> For further support to this view we look to Bodin's Six Bookes of

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20. E.M.W. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 11.

21. Ibid., p. 12.

22. Phillips, op. cit., p. 78.

23. Ibid., p. 80.

The idea of order appeared to the Elizabethans in three different fashions. First as a chain, says Tillyard, "Creation was a series of beings stretching from the lowest objects up to the archangel...." 20 The ascent was gradual. As Sir John Fortescue of the fifteenth century shows us: "In this order angel is set over man, man is set over man... God created as many different kinds of things as he did creatures, so that there is no creature which does not differ in some respect from all other creatures, and by which it is in some respect superior or inferior to all the rest.... It is important to think that he left unregulated the human race." 21

It would be well for all of us, tested on doctrines of democratic equality, to understand clearly here if we are to appreciate Renaissance political theory and the character of the state, that their concept of political society is based on the assumption that all men are not created equal. Sixteenth century theorists believed (as evidenced in Elyot's arguments) 22 that men are endowed with abilities and powers which vary with

the individual and determine his rank in the social and political scheme of things. "To have all degrees alike, and no inequalities, how inconvenient," remarks a commentator in the Holinshed version of *Chaucer's House of Bedlam* (1549). 23 For further support to this view we look to Bodin's six books of

20. E.M.W. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

22. *Ibid.*, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 80.



a Commonweale (1606). There can be no equality in wealth and talents of men, he argues; "and as for the power of command, which popular men would make equal, there is leese reason then in goods; for discretion and wisdom is not equally given to all men." <sup>24</sup>

To Renaissance thinkers the needs of mankind were many and varied. God then creates each man with certain ability which will satisfy not only his needs but those of some of his fellowmen. Thus no man, however limited his means, is created without a definite purpose. Blandy in The Castle, or Picture of Pollicy (1581) showed how in the sixteenth century the diversities among men were considered to be divinely adapted to the needs and purposes of society. <sup>25</sup> On the basis of these inequalities and functions men are divided into distinct classes. Thus we have the "degrees" which comprise the order of civil society.

Higden in his Polychronicon (ca. 1363) gives a summary of "degree." "In the universal order of things the top of an inferior class touches the bottom of a superior...The upper surface of the earth is in contact with the lower surface of water..." <sup>26</sup> The man who cannot live in civil company is either a god or a beast, reads the old adage, because only God is self-sufficient, and a solitary life best agrees only with beast.

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24. Ibid., p. 80.

25. Ibid., p. 81.

26. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 12.

a *Compendium* (1886). There can be no equality in wealth and talents of men, he argues; "and as for the power of command, which popular men would make equal, there is less reason than in God; for discretion and wisdom is not equally given to all men." 24

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24. *Ibid.*, p. 20.  
25. *Ibid.*, p. 21.  
26. *Polyarchon*, ca. 1583, p. 12.



This is the idea to which Shakespeare adheres and of which Ulysses in Troilus and Cressida spoke.

Bodin and Elyot, according to Phillips, had divergent views as to the determining factor in the order of degrees. Elyot believed that intellectual understanding was the basis for rank, while Bodin argues that moral virtue is the mark of true nobility.<sup>27</sup> Whether one or the other we readily see that this principle of ranking is in conformity with theories of the highest purpose of the state.

The doctrine of obedience, then, was fundamental in Renaissance society. It was considered essential that each individual adhere to the established order. Professor Allen remarks, "The religious duty of obedience to the Prince was constantly associated with the conception of a similar duty in relation to every recognized form of authority in human society..."<sup>28</sup> This view is one expressed by practically all sixteenth century theorists.

At this point it would be profitable to view an interesting statement made by Moulton. He felt that essentially pre-modern men differed little from one another, or they fell into definite classes; the earliest institutions rested on the idea of these classifications or of society as a whole. Advancing civilization carried with it a variation between the characters of different persons. Such awakened consciousness

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27. Phillips, op. cit., p. 83.

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At this point it would be profitable to view an interesting statement made by Aristotle. He felt that essentially pre-modern men differed little from one another, or they fell into definite classes; the earliest institutions rested on the idea of these classifications or of society as a whole. Advancing civilization carried with it a variation between the characters of different persons. Such awakened consciousness

27. Philippi, op. cit., p. 83.  
28. Allen, op. cit., p. 133.



of existing differences gave emphasis to the idea of individuality, and such a sense of individuality in each person necessarily awakened in him a consideration of like quality (individuality) in another. Thus arose in time individuality versus the state or order and degree in upheaval.<sup>29</sup>

It is well to bring to mind here that in sixteenth century thinking the welfare of the state was placed before the welfare of the individual. All activities point to the health and prosperity of the political society. Complete subordination of the individual to autocratic authority of the state was the result of the belief that only then would the ultimate welfare of the individual be brought about. "Obedience, diligence... will keep each man in his vocation and enable the commonwealth to achieve the ends for which it was established; rebellion, ambition...will turn a man from his duty and thus upset the whole order," state Phillips.<sup>30</sup>

Maintenance of the order of degrees was often compared with the harmony essential to the health of any organization. Edward Forset used the word "temperature" to show how the health of bodies, political or otherwise, was preserved. He argues that the four elements which make up the body--earth, fire, air and water--are paralleled in the political body by various degrees. An even mixture of these four elements, he states, must be maintained. Otherwise, disproportion among the

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29. R. Moulton, The Moral System of Shakespeare, passim.

30. Phillips, op. cit., p. 88.

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29. R. Moulton, The North System of Anarchy, p. 83.  
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elements, change in the normal "temperature" will cause illness.<sup>31</sup>

Amidst such organization when kings and rulers perform their duties of ruling wisely and administering justice, all men enjoy a life of tranquility. When merchants and farmers follow their vocations all men secure the materials necessary for adequate existence--and so down the line.

On the contrary, failure to maintain the established order of degree and vocation through disobedience and rebellion causes the state to be harassed by many evils and its internal structure to be impaired. Murder, famine, and the like are the results. Thus not only was rebellion considered a crime against God's representative, but its results were felt from "top to bottom." Ralph Birchinsa gives voice to his feelings in this regard in Discourse Occasional upon Late Defeat... (1602). He uses such invectives as "haters of truth, sworn slaves to rape..."<sup>32</sup>

Lily Campbell cites the work of Johnn Caron, The Three Bokes of Cronicles (1550) as emphasizing the dangers to the state of any change of government and the threats of conspiracy to its very existence. As regards obedience, "The magistrate must be obeyed. They who rebelled against the higher powers were never unpunished as...Brutus...Cassius..."<sup>33</sup>

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31. Ibid., p. 89.

32. Ibid., p. 91.

33. Campbell, op. cit., p. 37.

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Against such organization when kings and rulers perform their duties of ruling wisely and administering justice, all men enjoy a life of tranquillity. When tyrants and farmers follow their vocations all men secure the materials necessary for adequate existence--and so down the line.

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31. Ibid., p. 27.  
32. Ibid., p. 31.  
33. Campbell, op. cit., p. 32.



The initial picture or idea portrayed by Shakespeare's histories, Tillyard thinks, is that of disorder. The overall theme--war abroad and civil war at home. The fear of disorder is ever present; harmony is the infrequent exception. Henry V, for example, at Agincourt prays that the ever present curse of the ancestors may be missing. However, to picture Shakespeare's histories as complete examples of disorder would be a neither true nor accurate painting. Tillyard, as does Phillips, believes that behind this external appearance, namely disorder, is some sort of order or degree which has a duplicate in heaven. This opinion as we have seen was the thought-idiom of the times. Since history generates from theology, it is only natural to assume, says Tillyard, that there is a general religious doctrine behind the many events purported in Shakespeare's histories. It was common practice for the medieval chronicler in writing of creation to insert orthodox theology. Shakespeare's pattern according to Tillyard resembles that of Raleigh as seen in Raleigh's History of the World (1614). His frontispiece shows History, a female figure, treading down Death and Oblivion, flanked by Truth and Experience, supporting the globe; and over all is the eye of Providence. Raleigh's preface contains an account of English history from Edward II to Henry VII in a pattern similar to Shakespeare's. Behind both similar patterns of history it is logical to assume that like philosophical or theological premises existed. Thus from Raleigh's theological preface we might well be instructed on

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the commonplaces upon which Shakespeare's historical writings were founded. <sup>34</sup>

It is apparent, then, why men of the age harbored order and degree, and viewed with such horror disorder and rebellion. All the concomitants of upheaval--cowardice, injustice, recklessness, despair, and malice--take the place of fortitude, temperance, justice, prudence, and faith once the structural routine has been upset.

Because the ruler was the main problem of sixteenth century political thought, this particular degree among all others requires special consideration. Let us view the relationship between governing authority in the state, and the structure and purpose of that state.

We have seen previously, as Professor Allen observed, God "has so constructed society...that whatsoever section or aspect of it be regarded, we shall find ordained superiors and ordained subjects, and one bound to rule for the welfare of the other, the other loyally to obey." <sup>35</sup>

As stated before, since all men are not created equal, there must logically be a highest and a best degree, supreme above the others in all the political virtues with which men are endowed. Whether theorists believed that rulers are appointed by God or by the people, they consistently maintained that only certain men are enabled, by virtue of natural gifts

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34. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 8.

35. Allen, op. cit., p. 135.





and abilities, to bear authority. As expressed by Sir John Cheke (1549), "In countries some must rule, some must obeie..., for euerie man is not likewise, and they that have seen most and be best able to bear it, be most fit to rule." <sup>36</sup>

Machiavelli too realized the fact that rule is reserved for those naturally endowed with the talents which the vocation as he saw it demands. <sup>37</sup>

Whether the ruler is master or servant of the church, though a question heatedly debated in the Renaissance, is not the crux of this discussion. <sup>38</sup> Fundamentally, that the chief responsibility of the vocation of rule was the spiritual welfare of men is our present concern. By giving to each man according to his rank his just deserts, the ruler administers justice and enables all to attain the ordained ends--peace, prosperity, and virtue. By administering justly the ruler maintains that order and proportion in the state which produces the social and moral welfare of all its members. To borrow a figure from Forset, the ruler is a physician obligated to keep the body politic functioning in the way and for the purposes which nature intended. <sup>39</sup>

No account of princes and rulers can fail to record the influence of Saint Augustine's City of God (426). He set the ideal for the Christian prince or ruler in the famous passage

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36. Phillips, op. cit., p. 96.

37. Ibid., p. 98.

38. J.W. Allen, History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century, passim.

39. Phillips, op. cit., p. 101.

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The ruling authority of a political society will obey the laws because they are designed to develop the health of the whole realm. In this way the governor in his vocation, as every man in his respective degree, will work not for his own selfish good but for the good of the entire organization. The political thinking of the time insisted that authority and obedience alike are justified because the specialty of rule is ordained for the benefit not of a privileged few, but of subjects of all degrees. Thus for a well ordered state a ruling authority and obedient subjects are requisites.

Whether elective or hereditary, sixteenth century authority was consistently described in these terms of degree and vocation. Throughout the century it was generally believed that the power of rule was vested in a single individual, that government by one was ordained for the structure of political

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40. Campbell, op. cit., p. 34.

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society. The thinking of the day proclaimed monarchy to be superior to either aristocracy, the rule of the few, or democracy, the rule of the many. Aristocracy and democracy did not go unnoticed in sixteenth century political thought, but the sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of monarchy. Political actuality in Renaissance Europe was probably the principal circumstance which led theorists generally to condemn plurality forms of rule and to defend the unitary form.

Aristocracy was rejected by sixteenth century political opinion because of the dissension and resultant misrule which were believed to always accompany it. To quote Elyot, "Some, beings ones in authoritie, be incensed with glorie; some with ambition...whereby they fall into contention..."<sup>42</sup> Bodin likewise warns against the dangers of tyranny, rebellion and like political ills accompanying aristocracy.<sup>43</sup>

The denunciation of democracy was even stronger and more widespread. The rule of the many meant mob rule to Renaissance theorists. Elyot vividly pictures vengeance, stupidity, and cruelty as characteristic of the rule of the many.<sup>44</sup>

Democracy was also considered to be a violation of the accepted principle of inequality as well as a distortion of the order of degree based on the natural differences among men. Democracy conceived as mob rule, then, was rejected by sixteenth century

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42. Phillips, op. cit., p. 106.

43. Ibid., p. 106.

44. Ibid., p. 106, n. 46.

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43. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 100, n. 40.



theorists because it violated all the principles upon which a healthy political society is founded.

The term "monarchy" as it was usually employed in the sixteenth century must not be too strictly interpreted. It was given a general meaning which applied to the rule of emperors, princes, magistrates, dukes, and the like, as well as to hereditary kings. Arguments for monarchy in this general sense were based on the theory that such government is the ordinance of divine will and the law of nature.

The more important theorists in Renaissance political thought (Bodin, Merbury, and Haywood) argued in favor of absolute monarchy as seen in the actual Tudor government. A less important group (Knox, Parsons, Goodman) likewise insisted strongly that government is the institution of God and that monarchy is the most acceptable form of government. However, in disagreement they argued that the source of authority and the exercise of authority rested in two different parts of political society, and not in one monarch. Granted, the administration of sovereignty lay with the king; however, they claim that the power itself was delegated to the ruler by the people, and therefore could be revoked by them at will.

Fundamentally, then, the concept of political society regarding rule was the same. The structure, made up of degrees, is surmounted by a highest and best degree, singular in nature, whose duty it is to rule and govern. Mutual obligation and adherence to duty is the basis upon which the welfare of the

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Fundamentally, then, the concepts of political society regarding rule was the same. The sovereign, made up of degrees, is surrounded by a highest and best degree, singular in nature, whose duty it is to rule and govern. Actual obligation and adherence to duty is the basis upon which the welfare of the



whole organization depends.

Concrete examples of the above are there if we but look at the doctrine or correspondences as regards order.

One of the fundamental correspondences which implies the sequence of leadership is found in Ulysses' speech when he refers to "the glorious planet Sol." Here is literally meant God among the angels, the king in the state. Of all correspondences that between cosmic and human was the commonest.

Another frequent comparison (correspondence) was made between the storms in the heavens and the commotions in the state.

The universe as harmony or a dance to music is not a common picture; yet Shakespeare does refer to it in Troilus and Cressida as previously mentioned, "untune that string; And hark what discord follows." <sup>45</sup>

Thus it is plausible, thinks Tillyard, that when Shakespeare deals as he did with history he never forgot the principle of order behind all the terrible manifestations of disorder.

By way of pamphlets, sermons, and treatises these concepts were made the common knowledge of the rank and file Elizabethan as well as the more learned element in the population. The terms "order," "degree" and the like were as familiar to the sixteenth century layman as are the words

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45. The Oxford Shakespeare, I, iii.





"liberty" and "freedom" to us. A Tudor writer would almost certainly think and express himself in the language of this widely known concept.

To seek the exact sources of the Shakespearean doctrine of degree is futile. Some might say that to assume there is a connection between the thought of certain men and works and Shakespeare is presuming too much without the aid of concrete evidence. Tillyard's remark in this instance proves adequate. "...in these matters probability founded on common sense weighs more than any available evidence of direct borrowing." <sup>46</sup>

It is possible that in some way Shakespeare derived his ideas on degree from the original Book of Homilies (1547)-- passages in which are similar to some found in Ulysses. Phillips <sup>47</sup> and Tillyard <sup>48</sup> show that Shakespeare was undoubtedly influenced by the writings and views of many men as regards his stand on order and degree.

Polydore Virgil in writing for Henry VII adopted a definite pattern. He portrays God as working out the effects or crimes until order is re-established with the Tudor dynasty. Quite possible then Polydore to a point fashioned Shakespeare's future beliefs regarding order and degree.

Edward Hall, who wrote entirely during the reign of Henry VIII, is another who exerted influence upon the historical

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46. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 129.

47. Phillips, op. cit., Chapter III.

48. E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays, passim.

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writings of Shakespeare. He was the first to show the new moralizing of history. He introduced a sense of drama into his expression--the sense of the moral concatenation of great events. His work <sup>49</sup> portrays the theme of disorder and of union and "degree" following. Tillyard believes that Shakespeare in this regard copied Hall. <sup>50</sup>

Davies of Hereford moralizes on the dangers of an undisciplined people. He also adds his criticism of some of the kings and a moral that can be drawn from history--how easy it is to conquer a divided state. He believed that it was better to obey a bad king than to run into civil war and that a state ought to be an entire monarchy. <sup>51</sup> All, however, were familiar with the doctrines of rebellion and monarchy.

A popular source for the dissemination of these ideas was the Book of Homilies (1547) of the English Church. The Exhortation concerning good Orde (1547) states that whoever rules does so through the guidance of God. Princes then receive their power from God Himself. According to St. Paul in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, all subjects must obey their ruler--evil as well as good. Overthrow is not justified; the oppression of an evil ruler must be endured. This, in short, was the doctrine of the Tudors. Though convenient, it was in keeping with the times. Thus, during the time of Shakespeare,

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49. Edward Hall, The Union of the two noble and illustre Families of Lancaster and York. (1548).

50. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 45.

51. Ibid., p. 63.

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 events. His work as portrayed the theme of disorder and of  
 union and "degrees" following. Tilghart believes that  
 Shakespeare in this regard copied Hall.

Davis of Hereford maintains on the basis of an  
 undisciplined people. He also adds his criticism of some of  
 the kings and a moral that can be drawn from history--how easy  
 it is to conquer a divided state. He believed that it was  
 better to obey a bad king than to run into civil war and that  
 a state ought to be an entire monarchy. All, however, were  
 familiar with the doctrine of rebellion and monarchy.

A popular source for the dissemination of these ideas was  
 the book of Horace (1547) of the English Church. The  
Exhortation concerning good Order (1547) states that whoever  
 rules does so through the guidance of God. Princes then  
 receive their power from God Himself. According to St. Paul in  
 the thirteenth chapter of Romans, all subjects must obey their  
 ruler--evil as well as good. Overthrow is not justified; the  
 operation of an evil ruler must be endured. This, in short,  
 was the doctrine of the Tudors. Though convenient, it was in  
 keeping with the times. Thus, during the time of Shakespeare,

49. Edward Hall, The Union of the two noble and illustre  
families of Lancaster and York (1547).  
 50. Tilghart, op. cit., p. 43.  
 51. 1543, p. 63.



Elizabeth was the head of the church by a decree from on high. To serve her was to be in concord with the will of God.

An Homily against Disobedience and wilful Rebellion was introduced in 1569. It states that rebellion in no way can be condoned. A bad prince is an act of God to punish people for their sins. The proper procedure is not revolt but prayer that God will relieve them of this scourge.

Quite possibly Shakespeare obtained many of his ideas from the previously mentioned material. If not, it is unlikely that he missed absorbing these very ideas from the authors of A Mirror for Magistrates (1559). Shakespeare, much interested in contemporary poetry, must have grasped much from this latter source. This work is worthy of mention in the scheme of possible sources of influence. It deals with the same events as Shakespeare's histories and undoubtedly was a formative influence on Shakespeare. The main objective of this work was to teach a moral lesson to princes. The authors also present their notions of ethics and politics.

The Mirror expounds such general doctrines as education of the ruler, the king's status, obedience to the king, and civil war, all of which were common to the Elizabethan. Like the Homily of Obedience (1547) the Mirror teaches that the ruler derives his authority from God.

The question of loyalty was pertinent. As regards the limits to which obedience extends, the authors believed that a king who gave an order to commit a crime need not and must

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not be obeyed. This problem of personal loyalty to a king occurs frequently in Shakespeare. If the rightful king had been eliminated, the authors of the Mirror believed it was lawful to rise against the usurper, but even this could not be carried too far--his claim may have weakened. If a king obtained the crown by violence the rebellion is justified. The word used to describe a quite bad king was tyrant. Richard III was such a king. He acquired the crown by violence.

The king likewise had obligations to his subjects. Naturally, he had to be just, and he should be ready to listen to advice.

The proximity of the historical element in the Mirror with Shakespeare's conception of history is apparent.

The drama Gorboduc (1561) differs from A Mirror for Magistrates only in that it was directed at one person, namely Queen Elizabeth. Tillyard feels that most of the material is applicable to all princes, but primarily it points to Elizabeth. Its political theory and doctrine are much like that of the Mirror. It recognizes and emphasizes political order as part of a larger, divine order.<sup>52</sup> Consistent as regards rebellion, Gorboduc indicates that kings must be obeyed.

The chronicle plays Sir Thomas More (ca. 1565) and Woodstock (ca. 1570) are explicit and orthodox; that is, they

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52. Ibid., pp. 94-95.

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show the traditional Elizabethan notion of degree.

In an effort to learn where Shakespeare derived his ideas on history, such knowledge being important to a later discussion of the history plays themselves, we see that various writers and plays were a source for these ideas and that the general notions found with these writers and within their works were part and parcel of history. Such theories and ethics, as previously described, certainly must have been noticed by Shakespeare who was interested in such problems as the vicissitudes of fortune.

The majority of critics are in agreement--Henry V was Shakespeare's representative king. Says Wendell, "For all his humanity you feel him rather an ideal than a man; and an ideal, in virtue and vice alike."<sup>2</sup> Brainerd observes, "Henry V (1599) is a glorification of [the] national ideal. Its theme is English patriotism, and its appeal is to England rather than to the world."<sup>3</sup> Harriett believes that "in Henry V Shakespeare got his chance of depicting an ideal Christian Knight; a ruler who was at once popular and successful; a man whom we may both love and admire."<sup>4</sup>

Henry V then has been accepted by some of Shakespeare's

1. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

2. Barrett Wendell, *William Shakespeare*, p. 184.

3. George Brainerd, *William Shakespeare*, p. 204.

4. J. Harriett, *English History in Shakespeare*, p. 136.





## II. English History Plays

### Henry V

It is Tillyard's belief that Shakespeare was intent upon dramatizing the whole stretch of English history from Edward II to the peaceful reign under the Tudors;<sup>1</sup> in addition Shakespeare gave us an epic picture of contemporary England. Having created his picture of the villain king, it is now his lot to create a picture of the great hero king.

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1. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 304.  
2. Barrett Wendell, *William Shakespeare*, p. 184.  
3. George Brandes, *William Shakespeare*, p. 504.  
4. J. Marriot, *English History in Shakespeare*, p. 116.



most famous critics as the portrait of a stainless Christian warrior and an heroic example of what every happy man would wish to be.

Marriott asks the question, "Must we, after all, write down Prince Hal as a prig" <sup>5</sup> because of his attitude in dispelling Falstaff (Henry V, Part II)? Was it possible for him, on the threshold of a reign which he had resolved to dedicate to a high and noble purpose, to act otherwise than he did? The answer, in conjunction with our line of reasoning, seems rather obvious. Henry V (Prince Hal then) had to choose between disorder, as represented by Falstaff, and order, the kingly virtue toward which he was aiming. Tillyard believes that Shakespeare at the very outset shows Falstaff to be the symbol of misrule. <sup>6</sup> Palmer feels that from the merely political point of view Falstaff is a point of contact between two worlds. In him the larger life of humanity is brought in touch with the narrow life of the public person. <sup>7</sup> Whether Henry enjoyed this low life is purely a matter for personal conjecture. Shakespeare leaves us to decide for ourselves how far Henry is merely creating an alibi for his misdemeanors.

Falstaff is essential. He puts King and Prince, soldiers and conspirators in their proper place. All must eventually assume their proper position on the ladder of degree. Henry V,

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5. Ibid., p. 142.

6. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 287.

7. John Palmer, Political Characters of Shakespeare, p. 184.

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 142.  
6. Tilghard, *op. cit.*, p. 287.  
7. John Falstaff, *Political Characters of Shakespeare*,  
p. 144.



to be a successful king, must repudiate Falstaff. The discarding of this comic figure was, in fact, not only a political but a human necessity.

Henry is presented as a model of efficient and thoughtful royalty. Unlike Richard of Bordeaux, Henry V, before he ventures abroad to war against the French, must be satisfied that all is safe and well-ordered at home. Thus does he conform to one of the major principles required of all kings duly suited to rule--regard for all those under his command. The Archbishop assures him that all will be well by delivering his famous passage of the bees, the moral of which is based on the already familiar principle of order and degree, namely that the state is divided, like a swarm of bees into different classes or degrees, each of which has different functions.

Therefore doth heaven divide  
The state of man in divers functions

...

To which is fixed, as an aim or butt  
Obedience: for so work the honey-bees,  
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
The art of order to a peopled kingdom.  
They have a king and officers of sorts;  
Where some, like magistrates, correct at home,  
Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad  
Others, like soldiers...<sup>8</sup>

To the success of this venture it was essential that King Henry should first make sure of the ethical ground for his projected enterprise. The Archbishop again allays his conscience.

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8. I, ii, 184-93.

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 To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,  
 Obedience: for so work the honey-bees,  
 Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
 The art of order to a peopled kingdom.  
 They have a king and officers of sorts;  
 Where some, like anglers, stand at home,  
 Others, like merchants, venture trade abroad,  
 Others, like soldiers, armed with stings,

To the success of this venture it was essential that King  
 Henry should first make sure of the ethical ground for his  
 projected enterprise. The Archbishop again allays his  
 conscience.



... Gracious Lord,  
Stand for your own: unwind your  
bloody flag.<sup>9</sup>

Granted that this probably exposes the ways and means of public persons in high office who decide what they must do as men of affairs and later contrive to secure God's blessing on their endeavors, still in entering this foreign quarrel "Henry," says Boas, "is carrying out his father's death-bed counsel and is concerned with the principles of equity."<sup>10</sup>

Before setting sail for France we are shown that civil insecurity is ever present. The Lords Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey have conspired to assassinate the King. Again Henry shows his qualifications for rule by portraying a conviction that he is moved by no private passion but thinks only of the nation. He has these conspirators killed--the performance of an act of state necessary to his own security.

Touching our person seek we no revenge  
But we our kingdom's safety must so tender<sup>11</sup>

In rebuking Scroop Henry shows himself as God's representative and his impartial conduct of affairs as an aspect of the divine order of things.

Show men dutiful?  
Why, so didst thou: seem they grave and learned?  
Why, so didst thou: come they of noble family?

And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot...  
For this revolt of thine, me thinks, is like  
Another fall of man.<sup>12</sup>

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9. I, ii, 100-1.

10. Frederick Boas, Shakespeare and his Predecessors, p. 282.

11. II, iii, 174-75.

12. II, ii, 127-42.

... Gracious Lord,  
Stand for your own: giving your  
bloody life.

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endeavour, still in answering this foreign question "Henry," says  
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Touching our nation seek we no revenge  
But we our kingdom's safety must so tender. 11

In replying between Henry shows himself as God's representative  
and his impartial conduct of affairs as an aspect of the divine  
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And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot...  
For this revolt of mine, we think, is like  
Another fall of man. 12

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- 9. I, II, 100-1.
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  - 11. II, III, 174-75.
  - 12. II, III, 127-28.



Though the legitimacy of the war can be, and often is questioned, all this is forgotten on the field of Agincourt when the ideal English king and ruler is identified with the valour of the common man who is completely loyal to him. Visiting his men on the field of Agincourt, he calls them "brothers, friends, and countrymen."<sup>13</sup> Contrary to what is depicted in Coriolanus, all ranks acknowledge Henry's leadership and show the love which they bear their ruler. Pistol gives testimony to this fact.

The king's a bawcock, and a heart of gold,

...  
Of parents good, of fist most valiant:

I kiss his dirty shoe...

I love the lovely bully.<sup>14</sup>

Henry also at Agincourt gives voice to his feelings for his soldiers, his subjects--the commonweal.

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother;...<sup>15</sup>

Beverley Warner believes that this "catholic comprehension of Henry V's army before Harfleur and at Agincourt were [sic] symbolic of that oneness of national purpose which was to close the wounds of civil war with the death of the last Plantagenet, never again to be reopened for reasons of state."<sup>16</sup>

John Bates in a conversation with King Henry, who is in disguise, further glorifies this reign by showing that the

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13. IV, iii.

14. IV, i, 44-47.

15. IV, iii, 60-62.

16. Beverley Warner, English History in Shakespeare's Plays, p. 154.

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The king's a hawk, and a heart of gold,

... I get not good, of this most valiant;

I kiss his breech and ...  
 I love the lovely lady. 14

Henry also at Agincourt gives voice to his feelings for

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We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
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13. IV, 111.  
 14. IV, 1, 44-47.  
 15. IV, 111, 60-62.  
 16. Beverly Warner, English History in Shakespeare's  
 Plays, p. 124.



King's subjects adhere to all the sixteenth century principles believed necessary for a well-ordered state. Here absolute obedience of all subjects, a sixteenth century requisite, is exemplified..."for we know enough, if we know we are the king's subjects: if his cause be wrong, our obedience to the king wipes the crime of it out of us." <sup>17</sup> This scene in which Henry is identified with his soldiers lightens the mood of the play; yet by contrast the solemnity of the King's famous soliloquy shows Henry deeply concerned with his responsibility for the welfare of his people. Frederick Boas believes that as soon as Henry is left alone he unpacks his heart in words that show this strong man staggering under the burden of his great office. Nowhere does Shakespeare emphasize so unmistakably his cardinal conception of kingship as involving duties rather than privileges. <sup>18</sup> The young king has an overwhelming sense of responsibility.

...let us our lives, our souls,  
Our debts, our careful wives...lay on the king! <sup>19</sup>

Shakespeare is presenting in all simplicity a political hero, the things that a political hero does and says, the things required and expected of a good king. Henry apparently was determined to be not only a good sovereign but a perfect example of such. He must stand well with all the world. Says Brandes, Henry is at once the monarch who always thinks

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17. IV, i, 132-35.

18. Boas, op. cit., p. 287.

19. IV, i, 239-41.





royally, and never forgets his pride as the representative of the English people; the man with no pose or arrogance.<sup>20</sup> He is portrayed as a king who contrives to see himself as God's minister--a thought-idiom existent during the sixteenth century regarding all kings. He makes a pathetic effort to come to terms with the Almighty.

Not today, O Lord!  
O, not today, think not upon the fault  
My father made in compassing the crown!  
I Richard's body have interr'd anew.<sup>21</sup>

This soliloquy likewise shows that the usurpation to which he owes the crown lies heavy on his soul. He is penitent; he has done everything he can to mitigate the offence.

Shakespeare, as did the people of the sixteenth century, knew what to expect of a righteous king; he knew what sort of man succeeds in public life, and in Henry he presents us with just that sort of man. Shakespeare's concern as a dramatist was to present an individual to such good purpose that we dislike or admire him, find him here mean or there magnificent, as we should do in the case of any leader or man in public office.

Palmer has the right idea. "The mere fact that different people take different views of Henry, or that the same people can be so divided in their opinions about him according to the mood or moment of their approach, is the best possible proof of

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20. Brandes, op. cit., p. 205.

21. IV, ii, 301-4.

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Shakespeare's complete neutrality."<sup>22</sup>

We see that Henry's reign conforms to the principles of political organization ordained by universal law. There exists no violation of principles which Shakespeare held to be fundamental truths of political organization and conduct. Vocation is not neglected; justice and virtue are not forsaken by the political society; the principle of unitary sovereignty is not disregarded; hence both the aristocrat and the plebeian are presented in a favorable light.

In Henry V, like Coriolanus, a play whose mood is didactic, we saw aristocracy wholesomely, worthily dominant.

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22. Palmer, op. cit., p. 249.





In Henry VI Part II the vivid sketch of Jack Cade's rebellion shows a turbulently unreasonable mob which quickly comes to grief. In Julius Caesar the mob is actually the seat of power, which it transfers, at unreasoning impulse, from one great leader to another; but the great leaders, no unequal rivals, stand ready each in turn to personify imperial sovereignty. In Coriolanus, the mob, unreasoning, turbulent, capricious as ever, becomes a devouring monster. It no longer contents itself with transferring power; it seizes power for itself and once possessed of power behaves with unreason.

Cade's mob, though far more lightly treated, is essentially the mob of Julius Caesar and of Coriolanus.

A question is asked by Ernest Crosby. "What greater opportunity for idealizing the common people ever presented itself to a dramatist than to Shakespeare when he undertook to draw the character of Joan of Arc in the second part of Henry VI?" Crosby continues by stating that Shakespeare knew how to create noble women--that is one of his special glories--but he not only refused to see anything in the peasant girl who led France to victory, but he deliberately insults her memory with the coarsest and most cruel calumnies. Crosby states that the lapse of more than a century and a half should have enabled a man of honor to do justice to an enemy of the weaker sex, and he vehemently believes that if Joan had been a member of the French royal family certainly she would have received better

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treatment.<sup>23</sup> In retort, it would be well to give Charles Knight's opinion. He feels that in all previous scenes Shakespeare has drawn the character of the Maid with an undisguised sympathy for her courage, her patriotism, and her intellect. If she had been the defender of England and not of France, the poet could not have invested her with higher attributes. He believes that in Joan's mouth Shakespeare put his choicest thoughts and most musical verse.<sup>24</sup>

Obviously, this last statement is not a legitimate deduction. It gives evidence of too much adoration for the poet. Possibly the real reason was the state of the English mind and the evident purpose of Shakespeare to put upon the stage plays that would fire the English heart with enthusiasm and draw shillings from the English purse. This is not a hard view to take if we look upon Shakespeare as a man. As Tillyard sees it Joan fascinates Charles and imposes on the French an order which is, by nature, not theirs. Charles the Dauphin in showing by combat with Joan that this order is bogus and not divine is defeated. For a man to yield to a woman was a fundamental upsetting of degree.<sup>25</sup>

In the three parts of Henry VI we are never allowed to forget that King Henry the Fourth was the beginning and root

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23. Ernest Crosby, Shakespeare's Attitude Toward the Working Class, p. 128.

24. Charles Knight, "Studies of Shakespeare" in English History in Shakespeare's Plays, B. Warner, p. 179.

25. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 165.

23. In respect, it would be well to give Charles Knight's opinion. He feels that in all previous editions Shakespeare has drawn the character of the hero with an undisciplined sympathy for her courage, her patriotism, and her heroism. It has been the defender of England and not of France, the poet could not have invested her with higher attributes. He believes that in Joan's mouth Shakespeare put his choicest thoughts and most musical verse.

24. Obviously, this last statement is not a legitimate distinction. It gives evidence of a common education for the poet. Possibly the real reason was the state of the English mind and the evident purpose of such poems to put upon the stage a hero who would fire the English heart with enthusiasm and draw soldiers from the English purse. This is not a hard view to take if we look upon Shakespeare as a man. As Tillyard says in *Joan the English Maid* and *Joan on the French an order which is, by nature, not English*. Charles the Englishman in showing by contrast with Joan that this order is bogus and not divine is defeated. For a man to yield to a woman was a fundamental question of degree.

In the three parts of Henry VI we are never allowed to forget that King Henry the Fourth was the legitimate and good

23. Ernest Crosby, *Shakespeare's Attitude Toward the Working Class*, p. 128.  
24. Charles Knight, "Studies of Shakespeare" in *English History in Shakespeare's Plays*, E. Warner, p. 179.  
25. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 165.



of the discord and division. Mortimer says:

Henry the Fourth, grandfather to this king,  
Dispos'd his nephew Richard, Edward's son  
The first begotten and the lawful heir. <sup>26</sup>

The significance of the plays, in an historical sense, is to be found in the indications they afford of the perpetual quarrels among the nobility. Thus the plays prepare us, though in strangely confused fashion, for the outbreak of civil wars.

Amid all the bickering there moves the pathetic figure of the poor, spiritless, ineffective king. His part in the drama was wholly negative. Weak in health and not too strong in mind, Henry VI was the most unfortunate king that ever reigned. He is often compared with Richard II, and a certain weakness or effeminacy is seen in both characters. He could not bear the sight or knowledge of any wrong going on about him. Simple minded as a child, he trusted all those about him. In short, according to sixteenth century specifications, he was definitely unqualified to rule. Boas says that "Henry displays with pitiable clearness the incapacity of the moralizing devotee for the high duties of kingship. He has saintly aims, but his goodness never goes further than pious aspirations and utterances, and under his nerveless rule confusion becomes ever worse confounded." <sup>27</sup> When the nobles around him break into fierce quarrel, instead of coercing them into silence, he has only feeble appeals, and unctuous reflections on the blessings

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26. Part I, II, v, 63-65.

27. Boas, op. cit., p. 145.





that are given to the peacemakers. The king's strength must be sure to show itself in checking the excesses of his subordinates. Only so can he be free from rebellion, says Tillyard. 28

What Henry never realizes is that a man is entrusted with the high responsibilities of kingship not to secure contentment for himself, but, according to sixteenth century theorists, to further by strenuous action the well-being of the people over whom he is set as ruler. Thus his aspirations for holiness prove a curse instead of a blessing, and his kingdom is rent by civil strife.

As Marriott puts it, "The weakness of Henry VI had been from the start a perpetual source of misery for his people. Blameless as a man...few Kings of England have wrought more evil to their country." 29

If nothing else Henry gives us the most striking example of the principle of order and degree. It occurs in Henry's soliloquy in which he regrets that he was born a king and not a shepherd.

O God! me thinks it were a happy life  
To be no better than a homely swain;

...  
So many hours must I tend my flock

...  
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece

...  
Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.

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28. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 85.

29. Marriott, op. cit., p. 204.

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It nothing else Henry gives us the most striking example of the principle of order and degree. It occurs in Henry's soliloquy in which he regrets that he was born a king and not a shepherd.

Oh God! we think it were a happy life  
To be no better than a homely swain;  
So many hours must I bend my back  
So many years ere I shall shear the fleece  
Would bring white hairs into a father's grave.

28. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 55.  
29. Merrifield, *op. cit.*, p. 204.



Ah, what a life were this, how sweet,  
how lovely! <sup>30</sup>

This ordered life of a shepherd is pitifully small as compared with the majestic order of a king. Yet it represents the great principle of degree.

Crosby says that Shakespeare presents the history of his country as a mere pageant of warring royalties and their trains. When the people are permitted to appear, as they do in Cade's rebellion they are made the subject of burlesque. When Jack Cade comes on the scene he shows himself to be a braggart and a fool. <sup>31</sup> Cade says: "Be brave then for your captain is brave and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven half-penny loaves sold for a penny..., and I will make it a felony to drink small beer. All the realm shall be in common..." <sup>32</sup> Marriott refutes this by stating that this is one of the finest impressionist portraits of the crafty, loud-voiced demagogue and the self-seeking communist ever painted by the hand of a master. <sup>33</sup> Palmer feels that this episode of Cade's rebellion, cited as a supreme example of Shakespeare's anti-democratic spirit, turns out on examination to be an interlude graced with touches of humanity and humour. It leaves us with the impression that stupidity and ruthlessness in a mob are less repulsive than stupidity and ruthlessness in

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30. Part III, II, v, 21-41.

31. Crosby, op. cit., p. 154.

32. Part II, IV, ii, 59-63.

33. Marriott, op. cit., p. 192.

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30. Part III, II, v, 21-41.  
31. Grosby, op. cit., p. 124.  
32. Part II, IV, 50-63.  
33. Marston, op. cit., p. 123.



high places. <sup>34</sup>

Wendell takes the middle road. "His (Shakespeare's) personal convictions of course we can never know; as an artist, however, he was consistent throughout in his contempt--here laughing, but later serious--for the headless rabble." <sup>35</sup>

A word should be said here as to the nature of the insurrection led by Jack Cade. Whether or not this upheaval was instigated by York is immaterial. Warner points out that York has undoubted right to the title by strict law of primogeniture; <sup>36</sup> still Lancaster has three unbroken reigns and the strong claim of possession. The great mass of people, however, were not learned in questions of what constituted a legal title to the crown. In fact, writing with some of Cade's followers was considered an unnecessary art.

The movement which Cade headed had for its object political and economical reform. It was the rising of the peasants, under the leadership of a soldier. The rebellion aids York's plan--it shows the impious spectacle of the proper order reversed. In Cade we have a portrait, drawn with almost savage truth, of the mob-orator, the half-deceived and wholly-deceiving leader of purposeless revolution. He is a version of order and degree as shown in the light of contrast between his lawlessness and the discipline of Iden. In Part II, Henry VI

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34. Palmer, op. cit., p. 319.

35. Wendell, op. cit., p. 81.

36. Warner, op. cit., p. 184.

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34. Farmer, op. cit., p. 119.  
35. Wendell, op. cit., p. 81.  
36. Warner, op. cit., p. 184.



Cade boasts, "But then we are in order when we are most out of order." <sup>37</sup> In the manner of the proverbial Communist he believes that all order should be removed.

Iden, on the other hand, is entirely content with his own station in the social hierarchy.

Lord, who would live turmoiled in the court,  
Who may enjoy such quiet walks as these?  
This small inheritance my father left me  
Contenteth me, and worth a monarchy.  
I seek not to wax great by others waning;  
Or gather wealth I care not...  
Sufficeth that I have maintain~~ed~~ my state <sup>38</sup>

This speech is a definite example of order.

Cade makes futile promises (some of which are mentioned previously)--"...my mouth shall be the parliament of England." <sup>39</sup> As always the unthinking people believe all things of all men if only they can have a try at upsetting the standing order of things, the order and also the degree believed absolutely necessary for the welfare of the state.

Dick the butcher: "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers." <sup>40</sup> Cade's answer indicates the mental attitude of the peasantry of that day. "Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? that parchment, scribbled over, should undo a man?" <sup>41</sup>

Cade has the ignorance of his audience on his side. He has, in behalf of his appeals, the jealousy of the masses who

37. Part II, IV, iv, 176.

38. Part II, IV, x, 15-21.

39. Part II, IV, vii, 13.

40. Part II, IV, ii, 70.

41. Part II, IV, ii, 71-74.

Gade says, "But then we are in order when we are most out of

order." 37 In the manner of the proverbial Communist he

believes that all order should be removed.

Then, on the other hand, in entirely contrast with his own

attitude to the social hierarchy.

Lord, who would live paralysed in the court,  
who may enjoy such quiet walks as I have  
This shall I inheritance my father left me  
Contented me, and worth a monarchy.  
I seek not to wax great by others' wrongs;  
Or rather wish I were not...  
But I wish that I have maintained my state 38

This speech is a definite example of order.

Gade makes little promises (some of which are mentioned

previously)--"...my money shall be the payment of

England." 39 As always the undertaking people believe all

things of all right only they can have a try at restoring the

standing order of things, the order and also the degree

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With the outcome: "The first thing we do, let's kill all

the lawyers." 40 Gade's answer indicates the mental attitude

of the government of that day. "It is not only a dangerous thing

that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment

that parchment, scribbled over, should make a man's 41

Gade has the ignorance of his audience on his side. He

has, in behalf of his speaker, the jealousy of the masses who

37.	Part II, IV, 176.
38.	Part II, IV, 176-177.
39.	Part II, IV, 177.
40.	Part II, IV, 177.
41.	Part II, IV, 177-178.



are conscious of classes above them which are more accomplished and qualified to rule. As mentioned before, that a man can read and write is monstrous to the peasants. Thus Cade's charge against Lord Say is not exaggerated: "Thou has most traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school...thou hast caused printing to be used." 42

To quote Wendell what the mob attacks throughout is literally aristocracy--the rule of those who are best. This, with instinctive democratic distrust of excellence and superiority, the mob is bound to overthrow. 43

Crosby indicates that Shakespeare believed that nothing must be said against authority. He goes on to say that such is Shakespeare's conception of history: "Who could guess from reading these English historical plays that throughout the period which they cover English freedom was growing, that justice and the rights of man were asserting themselves, while despotism was gradually curbed and limited?" This, he says, is the one great glory of English history reflected in Wat Tyler (Jack Cade) and others. 44 Surely the actions of men like Cade did not reflect the glory of English history.

To argue that Shakespeare's whole outlook upon politics was aristocratic would seem to be an exaggerated inference; but it is clear enough that Shakespeare had little enthusiasm for mob politics and held the mere demagogue in supreme contempt.

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42. Part II, IV, viii, 29-32.

43. Wendell, op. cit., p. 329.

44. Crosby, op. cit., p. 157.

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42. Part II, IV, viii, 29-32.  
 43. Wendell, op. cit., p. 329.  
 44. Grosby, op. cit., p. 127.



The speech of Ulysses already quoted defines his attitude with sufficient exactitude. Like most Englishmen of his day, he accepted the firm rule of the Tudors as a relief after the anarchy which marked the middle years of the fifteenth century. Despotism he disliked as much as he despised demagogism. In short he believed in ordered, sovereign government. It is strange that those who find in Cade's barbarity an indication of Shakespeare's horror of the mob should neglect to find in the barbarity of Clifford, York, and others an indication of his horror of nobility.

In Part II was the murder of Humphrey of Gloucester, the rise of York, the destruction of Humphrey's murderers. The country is near to chaos. In Part III we see chaos itself, civil war, and the perpetration of one horrible deed after another. The height of wilful cruelty is here represented by those who should have been most civilized--the aristocracy. Clifford, incensed from the loss of his father, murders York's son Rutland, aged twelve.

In the working out of the inherited curse, we see dissension affecting all people, not only those who give it impetus--the nobles--but also the common people. The whole framework feels the pain.

In conclusion it might be well to point out that Brandes feels there is contempt for the judgment of the masses here. He feels that this anti-democratic conviction, having taken possession of Shakespeare's mind, Shakespeare keeps on





instinctively seeking out new evidences in its favor, and therefore he transforms facts where they do not suit his view.<sup>45</sup>

It is not right to judge Shakespeare by the standards of twentieth century humanitarianism. This was an age when to view the suffering of animals and the antics of the mad was considered sport. As Tillyard points out--also to exemplify the principles of degree--consider that at the siege of La Rochelle costly dishes were allowed to be carried to a noble while a population was dying of starvation.<sup>46</sup> Such discrimination between classes was taken for granted. That the subhuman element should be treated basely was also taken for granted in Shakespeare's day.

45. Brandes, op. cit., p. 113.

46. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 277.

...think our new position is the best, and

...they are the same as before, when they do not think this

view.

It is not right to judge Shakespeare by the standards of

twentieth century humanism. This was an age when the

view of the world of nature and the world of the mind was

considered as one. As Tillyard notes, the world was not

the product of a process, but a state of being.

Shakespeare's world was not a state of being, but a

process. It was a process of becoming, and it was

in this process that the world of Shakespeare was

created. It was not a state of being, but a

process of becoming, and it was in this process



### Richard III

The bloody dog is dead. Such was Richard the Third's epitaph. He achieved political eminence by killing those who stood in his way. He secured the support of his confederates by involving them in his own sinister plots and promising them a share of the loot. He obtained the consent of his subjects by means of subterfuge.

Dowden says this of Richard. "He inverts the moral order of things and tries to live in this inverted system. He does not succeed; he dashes himself to pieces against the laws of the world which he has outraged."<sup>47</sup> Beverley Warner's version seems to be the verdict of history. He states that Richard III was a villain so unnatural as to be almost supernatural.<sup>48</sup>

Deformed as he was, Richard holds that the ordinary human ties do not exist for him, that he is not called upon to deal in the soft laws of love.

I that am curtail'd of this fair proportion  
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature

...  
And therefore,--since I cannot prove a lover,...  
I am determined to prove a villain.<sup>49</sup>

Coleridge feels that we should accept this play as a sublime warning of the "dreadful consequences of placing the moral in subordination to the intellectual being."<sup>50</sup>

The main attraction of the play written in 1593 is

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47. Ibid., p. 210.

48. Warner, op. cit., p. 208.

49. I, i, 18-30.

50. Marriott, op. cit., p. 238.

Richard III

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Bowden says this of Richard. "He lowered the moral order  
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Deformed as he was, Richard holds that the ordinary human  
 does not exist for him, that he is not called upon to deal  
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I that am curst with this fall proportion  
 Checked of feature by dissembling nature

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47. Ibid., p. 210.  
 48. Warren, op. cit., p. 204.  
 49. I. i. 18-19.  
 50. Marriott, op. cit., p. 212.



Richard's character, though he is subservient to a greater scheme. The scheme or fundamental principle of the tetralogy was the principle order. The force which unifies all four plays is the political theme: the theme of order and chaos, of political degree and civil war, of crime and punishment.

In Henry VI reference has been made to this principle. In Part II Henry VI the character Iden and his contentment with his own station in life is representative, in Part III Henry VI, the king's desire for the ordered life of the shepherd conforms: Finally, in Richard III the scene of the three citizens (Act II, Sc. iii) in which they indicate that God is the controlling force behind all authority and the end of the play itself give voice to the principle of order. In the latter instance, Richmond restores order to a state divided by strife, and peace again lives.

Essentially Shakespeare's Richard is of the diabolical class. He is not weak, for he wilfully devotes himself to evil. As mentioned previously, he tries to live in an inverted system of moral order, but he does not succeed. He was never inspired by pity or even affection for any moral thing. Everyone and everything were regarded merely from the point of view of his own personal ambition, as instruments to be used or obstacles to be eliminated. Power is everything to him, his fixed idea. Many lives stand between him and his goal; but he will shrink from no falsehood, no treachery, no bloodshed, if only he can reach it. Certainly, according to the standards

Richard's character, though he is subservient to a greater scheme. The scheme or fundamental principle of the tragedy was the princely order. The forces which united all four plays is the political theory: the theme of order and chaos, of political heroes and civil war, of crime and punishment. In Henry VI reference has been made to this principle. In Part II Henry VI the character of the king and his contentment with his own station in life is representative; in Part III Henry VI, the king's desire for the order and life of the shepherd comes forward; finally, in Richard III the scene of the three citizens (Act II, Sc. 111) in which they indicate that this is the controlling force behind all anarchy and the end of the play itself gives voice to the principle of order. In the latter instance, Richard restores order to a state divided by strife, and peace again lives.

Essentially Shakespeare's Richard is of the disordered class. He is not weak, for he actively devoted himself to evil. As mentioned previously, he tries to live in an inverted system of moral order, but he does not succeed. He was never inspired by any or even affected by any moral thing. Every one and everything were regarded merely from the point of view of his own personal ambition, as instruments to be used or obstacles to be eliminated. Power is everything to him, his fixed idea. Many lives stand between him and his goal; but he will shrink from no villainy, no treachery, no bloodshed, if only he can reach it. Certainly, according to the standards



of the sixteenth century or any century for that matter, he was not fit or qualified to rule. One thing can be said for Richard, however; he is not a hypocrite: he deceives no one, not even himself.

Richard's murder of the princes in the Tower, critics usually agree, is his best title to be considered as one of the master criminals of history.

The most arch deed of piteous massacre  
That ever yet this land was guilty of 51

The rest of his crimes were in the way of political business. The removal of a political rival in that age apparently did not excite too much comment; but the murder of two innocent boys, though inspired by a similar motive, was unbelievably fiendish.

But as the suspense of his evils become intolerable, Shakespeare gives us a hint that the Powers above are delaying, not forgetting. The warning note of Richard's downfall is struck in Stanley's brief announcement "Dorset is fled to Richmond." 52 Here for the first time in the play is mentioned the name of God's avenger--Richmond.

Shakespeare believed and accepted the belief that God had directed the course of England towards the Tudor haven, thinks Tillyard. 53 Richmond leaves no doubt of this by showing himself to be God's minister. He says on the night before doing battle:

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51. IV, iv, 2-3.

52. IV, ii, 48.

53. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 204.

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Richard's murder of the princes in the Tower, critics usually agree, is his best title to be considered as one of the greatest criminals of history.

The most cruel deed of Richard's reign  
That ever yet this land was guilty of.

The rest of his crimes were in the way of political business. The removal of a political rival is that we should not exclude too much comment; but the murder of two innocent boys, though inspired by a selfish motive, was undeniably childish. But as the substance of his evil becomes intolerable, Shakespeare gives us a hint that the towers above are delaying, not forgetting. The warning note of Richard's downfall is struck in Stanley's brief announcement "Darest thou lead to Richmond." Here for the first time in the play is mentioned the name of God's avenger--Richmond.

Shakespeare believed and expected the belief that God had directed the course of England towards the Tudor house, thinks Tilford. Richmond leaves no doubt of this by showing himself as God's minister. He says on the night before doing

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51. IV, 2-3.  
52. IV, 48.  
53. Tilford, op. cit., p. 204.



O Thou whose captain I account myself  
Look on my forces with gracious eye

Make us thy ministers of chastisement 54

Richmond appears confident that he is God's representative. In Richmond's dreams he is comforted and strengthened by assurance that his course is just. Dramatically he appears "expressly as the champion and representative of the moral order of the world which Richard had endeavored to set aside." 55 In the fight on Bosworth Field there is at stake a moral issue between the powers of light and darkness, the principles of right and wrong.

The battle of Bosworth Field ended in victory for Richmond.

God and good angels fight on Richmond's side  
And Richard falls in height of all his pride 56

Richmond is the exemplification of the principle of order in Richard III. Richmond is pious and to God gives all the praise after victory, "God and your arms be praised, victorious friends." 57 His next concern is his fellow men. "Inter their bodies as becomes their birth." 58 This statement, consistent with sixteenth century principle, shows his concern for the fostering of degree on earth, and should not be considered as a derogatory reflection by Shakespeare on the common man.

As we have seen, it was considered a great wrong to fight

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54. V, iii, 108-13.

55. Marriott, op. cit., p. 231.

56. V, iii, 175-76.

57. V, v, 1.

58. V, v, 15.

O Thou whose counsel I receive myself  
look on my former ways and

Make us thy ministers of righteousness

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himself as the champion and representative of the moral order

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24. v. 111, 108-13.  
25. Richard, 90, 111, 108-13.  
26. v. 111, 108-13.  
27. v. 111, 108-13.  
28. v. 111, 108-13.



against a king--Richard was a king. Yet he so clearly showed himself to be a usurper as well as a murderer unfit to rule that he is classified as a tyrant against whom it was considered lawful to fight and rebel.

For what is he they follow? truly, gentlemen  
A bloody tyrant...  
If you do sweat to put a tyrant down,  
You sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain. 59

As Tillyard words it, Richard represents a great sore on the body politic. He is a poison which God's will eliminates.<sup>60</sup> Richmond on the one side representing the forces for good fights against Richard representing the forces of hell.

Richmond looked out upon a new land. The Baron was there, but there too was a swarming multitude who uttered the voice of a third power more potent to influence kings than priest or noble, the power of the Common People, tilling the soil as of old, but learning the lessons of self-restraint and self-respect.

There was no great uprising of the commons either for Richard or for Richmond. The people on a whole are sullenly indifferent. As to dynastic claims these same people are likewise indifferent, but they do crave strong government.

John Masfield writes: "The intellect of Richard...is restless, swift and sure of its power. It is sure, too, that the world stays as it is from something stupid in the milky human feelings...Richard is a bloody dog...but nobler than the

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59. V, iii, 245-57.

60. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 208.

against a king-Richard was a king. Yet he so clearly showed himself to be a murderer as well as a murderer until he was that he is classified as a tyrant against whom it was considered lawful to fight and rebel.

For what is he they follow? Why, gentlemen, a bloody tyrant. If you do want to put a tyrant down, you sleep in peace, the tyrant being slain. 29

As I think words is, Richard represented a great one on the body politic. He is a poison which God's will eliminates. 30 Richard on the one side representing the forces for good rights against Richard representing the forces of evil.

Richard looked out upon a new land. The land was there, but there too was a swelling multitude who uttered the voice of a third power more potent to influence things than either of noble, the power of the Common People, lifting the soul as of old, but learning the lessons of self-restraint and self-respect.

There was no great rivalry of the commons either for Richard or for Richard. The people on a whole are entirely indifferent. As to dynastic claims these are people are like-wise indifferent, but they do crave strong government.

John Massfield writes: "The intellect of Richard... is restless, swift and sure of its power. It is sure, fast, that the world stays as it is from something steady in the eddy human feelings... Richard is a bloody dog... but nobler than the



sheep he destroys" 61

Like many others Masfield is swept into a mood of devil-worship and is tempted to ignore the plain meaning of the fundamental lesson of the play. The mass of people are, on the whole, true to their domestic instincts, true to their vocations, and consequently true to order and degree. They resent their betrayal, by those who sit over them in authority, but they adhere to the prevailing tenets of order and degree. Slow to rebel against usurpation, they undoubtedly have a loathing of the bare idea of another civil war like that of the Roses.

As Warner remarks the manner of Henry VII's accession to the throne marks the epoch toward which all previous reigns in English history had been contributing, viz., the voice of the people in the choice of a king. For Richmond was seated upon the throne, and reigned, neither by hereditary right or by right of conquest, but through the voice of a free Parliament. In that act we perceive a denial of the extreme doctrine of hereditary right, the death of feudalism, and the voice of the commonalty. The commons were often thereafter to be oppressed and deluded, but generation after generation found them making their voices more distinctly heard.<sup>62</sup>

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61. Palmer, op. cit., p. 115.

62. Warner, op. cit., p. 294.

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and deluded, but generation after generation found them making  
their voices more distinctly heard. 62



### King John

King John is pictured as a wicked king who murdered his nephew and also, by some writers, as a tyrannical king who oppressed the people. Says Warner, John was, in moral stamina, the most fickle and nerveless of leaders.<sup>63</sup> John is presented in the main in a despicable light, and this presentation is in accord with the historical facts.

It is admitted that Shakespeare wrote from an original which throughout betrayed an assured bias. Palmer believes that the solemn bigotry of the original is utterly transformed by Shakespeare.<sup>64</sup> There is no anti-Catholic bias in his play.

Shakespeare exhibits the persons of his drama as inspired throughout the play by motives of expediency. Says Boas, "It is here that he unfolds his practical, political philosophy, in which he traces all errors in a well-peised [sic] world to..... commodity."<sup>65</sup> In King John (1595) we see that commodity is the impediment to the straight flowing principle of order.

With that same purpose-changer,  
that sly devil,

...  
That smooth-fac'd gentleman,  
tickling commodity,  
Commodity, the bias of the world. <sup>66</sup>

John by his crimes and cowardice deserved the worst. He is driven, not on grounds of principle but solely in deference to commodity.

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63. Ibid., p. 33.

64. Palmer, op. cit., p. 331.

65. Boas, op. cit., p. 247.

66. II, i, 567-74.

King John

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It is admitted that Shakespeare wrote from an original  
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throughout the play by motives of expediency. Says Reade, "It  
is here that he unfolds his practical political philosophy, in  
which he traces all errors to a well-defined (sic) world so....  
commodity." In King John (1595) we see that commodity is  
the impediment to the straight flowing principle of order.

With that same purpose-changer,  
that evil devil,

that smooth-faced gentleman,  
licking commodity,  
Commodity, the state of the world.

John by his crimes and cowardice deserved the worst. He  
is driven, not on grounds of principle but solely in defence  
to commodity.

63. Ibid., p. 33.  
64. Palmer, op. cit., p. 331.  
65. Reade, op. cit., p. 247.  
66. II, i, 567-74.



Most critics feel that John usurped the throne belonging by right to his nephew Andrew. Some feel, however, that Shakespeare has so fastened the idea of usurpation upon the English mind that John is considered an unconstitutional ruler. Marriott feels that John was not, according to legal theory, a usurper. He believes that to Shakespeare the question of "right" depended upon the personal qualities of the ruler.<sup>67</sup> When the play opens John's intellectual incapacity for the crown had not been proved. He had to be tried. This he was, and he was found utterly wanting. He again and again proved his unfitness to rule.

This kingdom, this confine of blood and breath  
Hostility and civil tumult reigns.<sup>68</sup>

The character of Philip Faulconbridge is looked upon as an ideal of the poet's brain. Brandes feels that Faulconbridge is at first full of youthful insolence, the true medieval nobleman, who despises the burgess class simply as such. But in the course of action he ripens more and more, and displays ever greater qualities--humanity, right-mindedness, and a fidelity to the king.<sup>69</sup> He is Shakespeare's living contrast to all the other public persons of the play who succumb to the devil commodity. Palmer feels that Faulconbridge is Shakespeare's device for stripping the villain of his disguise.<sup>70</sup> Faulconbridge in the play represents the thousands of loyal,

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67. Marriott, op. cit., p. 51.

68. IV, ii, 246-47.

69. Brandes, op. cit., p. 145.

70. Palmer, op. cit., p. 329.

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crown had not been proved. He had to be tried. This he was,

and he was found utterly wanting. He again and again proved

his unfitness to rule.

This kingdom, this realm of blood and breath  
Hostility and civil tumult reigns.

The character of Philip Lovegrove is looked upon as an

ideal of the poet's brain. Brander is a good Lovegrove in

at first full of youthful innocence, the true medieval noble-

man, who despises the vulgar class nearly as much. But in the

course of action he rises more and more, and displays ever

greater qualities--humanity, right-mindedness, and a fidelity

to the king. He is Shakespeare's loving contrast to all the

other male persons of the play who succumb to the devil

commodity. Palmer feels that Lovegrove is Shakespeare's

device for stripping the villain of his disguise.

Lovegrove in the play represents the thoughts of love,

- 67. Marricott, op. cit., p. 51.
- 68. *Id.*, 245-47.
- 69. Brander, op. cit., p. 145.
- 70. Palmer, op. cit., p. 329.



steadfast men, citizens of England. These individuals are not nobles, nor barons, nor degraded serfs, but men--the forgotten men.<sup>71</sup> They are the men who are plowing and sowing; buying and selling; paying the taxes of despotism and suffering the inconveniences of oppression, while doing their duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call them. These men faced the daily problems of life complaining but little. They are loyal to the king simply because he is the king.

Thus Philip Faulconbridge, the symbol of order and degree and the counterpart of the common people in the play, is so favorably presented by Shakespeare that bias towards the many cannot conceivably be attributed to the poet. It would appear that Shakespeare intended to have him represent the sturdy heart of English manhood which finally rose to its proper place in the making of later and nobler England as commons.

In King John the Bastard finds it necessary to make a choice between sedition and the dishonor of serving a bad master. He decided on the latter, for, unlike Richard III, John though bad, is not really a tyrant. The thought-idiom of the time declares it to be better to live under the rule of a bad king than to rebel and incur God's disfavor by upsetting the principle of order as well as degree. Sedition would undoubtedly intensify the punishment which the country was already undergoing. On the other hand, God might possibly

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71. Warner, op. cit., p. 50.

steepest men, citizens of England. These individuals are not  
 nobles, nor barons, nor gentry, nor the landed  
 gentry. They are the men who are giving and receiving  
 and selling; saying the words of devotion and suffering the  
 inconveniences of operation, while doing their duty in that  
 state of life to which it had pleased God to call them. These  
 men faced the daily problems of life complaining but little.

They are loyal to the king simply because he is the king.  
 Thus William Shakespeare, the symbol of order and justice

and the counterpart of the common people in the play, is so  
 favorably treated by Shakespeare that also towards the many  
 cannot conceivably be attributed to the poet. It would appear

that Shakespeare intended to have him return to the sturdy  
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In King John the poet finds it necessary to make a

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John though bad, is not really a tyrant. The thoughtfulness  
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of a bad king than to rebel and incur God's displeasure.

Regarding the principle of order as well as justice, rebellion  
 would undoubtedly intensify the punishment which the country  
 was already undergoing. On the other hand, God might possibly



turn the king's heart to good. Such was the accepted belief at the time.

Because Shakespeare fails to mention the Magna Carta in this play, he is often charged with having strong aristocratic tendencies. Most critics feel that Shakespeare had never heard of it. Both Boas and Marriott are of that opinion.

"Shakespeare had small knowledge of that document, and a very inadequate sense of its importance," says Boas. He continues with the remark that it was only under the Stuarts when this communion of feeling between ruler and ruled ceased to exist, that the champions of national liberty were forced to drag out the scrolls of the Magna Carta.<sup>72</sup> The hyper-critical Brandes conveys a like belief. He feels that Shakespeare did not attribute to the event the importance it really possessed; did not understand that the Magna Carta laid the foundation of popular liberty. Brandes also implies that possibly Elizabeth did not care to be reminded of it. People felt indebted to her for a great national revival; hence, the nation was willing to humour her.<sup>73</sup>

Palmer makes the interesting observation that Shakespeare, charged with anti-democratic bias for neglecting to mention the Magna Carta, a document unknown to him, allows the plain citizens of Angiers to be privileged spectators of the

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72. Boas, op. cit., p. 243.

73. Brandes, op. cit., p. 149.

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essentially comic behaviour of two royal suitors for their favour. These citizens, moreover, speak more to the purpose than the great ones who threaten them with destruction.<sup>74</sup>

In John we see little display of the different grades of society. Hubert's description of the common people would seem to indicate otherwise.

Another lean unwashed artificer  
Cuts off his tail.<sup>75</sup>

However, Tillyard believes that this does not represent any large political motive for artificers, he asserts, are not members of the body politic.<sup>76</sup>

74. Palmer, op. cit., p. 325.

75. IV, ii, 201-2.

76. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 233.

essentially comic behavior of two rays, which for their  
favor. These circles, however, are not to be confused  
with the great one who characterizes them with destruction.  
In fact we are little dimly of the different grades of  
society. In fact the description of the common people would seem  
to indicate otherwise.

Another less unusual critic  
Gates of his call.

However, Tillyard believes that this does not represent any  
large political motive for architects, he suggests, and not  
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74. Palmer, op. cit., p. 322.  
75. IV, 11, 201-2.  
76. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 317.





### III. Julius Caesar

Shakespeare demonstrates in Coriolanus that the

governing principles of order, duty, and reason were necessary to the survival of a healthy political state. He indicates that aristocracy is the form of government ordained for any state and consequently portrays democracy as a violation of these fundamental principles. Rome did not achieve the desired political organization as will be later indicated in Coriolanus--the tragedy of conflict and sovereignty between, both individual and authoritative, to emphasize this fact. As we have seen, the necessity of rule must be exercised by a single authority, not divided among several. This fundamental political belief prevailed during the Renaissance is indicated, among other things, in Julius Caesar (1601). Montaigne takes a different viewpoint. Generations of time separate the lives Coriolanus and Julius Caesar, and he feels the emphasis on the individual life has advanced with the years. "Rome is still a republic, and the republican ideal is a mighty force. But alike those who cherish this ideal, and those who oppose it, have been secretly moulded by the growth of



individual character." <sup>2</sup>

The multitude though still the spirit and semblance of individuality has now become the power. The question which was a burning issue in Coriolanus and which parallels the time-worn question, "Does that state exist for the people?" found an affirmative answer in Julius Caesar. The popular voice, the voice of the individual speaking collectively, is the stairway towards achievement. Caesar can attain supremacy only through popular approval. In short, the people are the source of rule. Still in this drama the evils of multiple sovereignty, which are the disastrous consequence of Julius Caesar's assassination, are vividly contrasted with the advantages of monarchy, apparent under Caesar's rule.

Roman history around the time of Julius Caesar was often employed by Renaissance political thinkers to confirm the argument for monarchy. Proof that monarchy was the ideal form of government is indicated in the stability which Caesar achieved under his dictatorship, in the upheaval which followed his assassination, and in the peace which returned under the monarchical rule of Augustus. As Sir Thomas Elyot said, "... moche discord was ever in the citie for lack of one governour."<sup>3</sup> In the same vein Thomas Craig continued, "How many dreadful miseries followed [Caesar's] death? The Slaughter of both

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2. Moulton, op. cit., p. 126.

3. Thomas Elyot, The Boke Named the Governour, p. 13.

The mistake is to call the noble and noble of individuality has now become the power. The question which was a burning issue in German and which parallels the life-work of the nation, "Does that state exist for the people?" found an affirmative answer in Julius Caesar. The noble voice, the voice of the individual speaking collectively, is the doorway towards nobility. Caesar can attain nobility only through noble removal. In short, the noble is the source of noble. Still in this there the idea of noble nobility, which are the disastrous consequence of Julius Caesar's assassination, are vividly contrasted with the nobility of nobility, apparent under Caesar's rule.

Roman history during the time of Julius Caesar was often employed by Renaissance political thinkers to confirm the argument for monarchy. Proof that monarchy was the ideal form of government is indicated in the stability which Caesar achieved under his dictatorship, in the nobility which followed his assassination, and in the peace which returned under the monarchical rule of Augustus. As Sir Thomas Lyot said, "...no discord was ever in the title for lack of one government." In the same vein Thomas Carlyle continued, "How many despots miseries followed (Caesar's) death? The slaughter of both

2. Moulton, op. cit., p. 150.  
 3. Thomas Lyot, The Rome Named the Government, p. 15.



Consuls...the arms of the Romans were turn'd against themselves to their own destruction...the very name of Romans was almost blotted out by their own hands, soon after that the Famine in the land over all Italy...Finally, the Commonwealth was so distressed and torn in pieces and so tired with its Liberty and Democracy, that all consented to have a Monarchy, which all the people formerly had in great abhorrence, and chose to rest there only, as in a safe and fortified harbour against all Storms, Seditions and Tumults of the people. These were the fruits of Democratic Government..."<sup>4</sup> We see then that these events were indeed significant to Renaissance thinkers.

Phillips believes, as do others, that the central political thesis in Julius Caesar is the practical and theoretical necessity for monarchy.<sup>5</sup> MacCallum likewise agrees that "Shakespeare makes it abundantly clear that the rule of the single master is the only admissible solution for the problem of the time."<sup>6</sup> On this score there is apparently little disagreement among the majority of critics. Let us here examine the play itself in order to see how certain conclusions have been reached and also to show that the ideas of monarchy are an integral part of the pattern of political thought shared by Shakespeare with the majority of his contemporaries.

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4. Phillips, op. cit., p. 173.

5. Ibid., p. 174.

6. M.W. MacCallum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays, p. 214.

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4. Phillips, op. cit., p. 173.  
 5. Ibid., p. 174.  
 6. F.W. MacCallum, Shakespeare's Roman Plays, p. 214.



Caesar's return after his victory over the forces of Pompey marked the consolidation of Caesar's power as a dictator and automatically suppressed those factions which had made Roman life so turbulent. The citizens have no longer any part in the government of Rome; the senatorial party now becomes merely an advisory body. In this regard Wells states that the old officers of the state were to be looked upon in the future only as ornamental dignitaries. "...let all men see that it [Senate] was to play a purely subordinate part in the new government." <sup>7</sup>

Thus under Caesar we see existing what the Renaissance thinkers considered absolute--the aristocrats functioning in their degree and vocation as counselors and the citizens active at their proper level as obedient subjects. In the first part of the drama the common people happily pursue their respective careers. They are completely loyal. Sir Mark Hunter states, "They seem to be quite happy; only eager, like the good fellows they are; to get themselves into more work." <sup>8</sup> Although the plebeians, as might be suspected, are described as unfit to govern, there is no indication that they even desire such authority. They are subject to the will of Caesar; he is their dictator. It is only after his death that they seek to leave their stratified level and function out of degree

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7. J. Wells, A Short History of Rome (1896), p. 282.

8. M. Hunter, Politics and Character in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, p. 117.

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 he is their dictator. It is only after his death that they  
 seek to leave their stratified level and function out of degree



by taking justice into their own hands. As mentioned previously the Senate, once the authority in Rome, is now subservient to the will of Caesar. The lack of regard Caesar shows for this body is indicated

To be afear'd to tell greybeards the truth?  
Decius, go tell them Caesar will not come;

....  
The cause is in my will, I will not come,  
That is enough to satisfy the senate.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Caesar in reality is the sole power in Rome. He is represented by Shakespeare as ably qualified to rule according to sixteenth century standards. As MacCallum sees things, Caesar, with his transcendent gifts, was chosen by Providence to preserve the Roman State from shipwreck, and steer it on its triumphant course; and even if the helmsman perished, the course was set.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, he does have personality weaknesses, but certainly these do not alter his ability as an able and successful governor. This minor weakness or decline in the man is obviously (as we have seen from previous discussion) not valid or reasonable grounds for eliminating, as do the assassins, the monarchic institution which he represents. As MacCallum again points out, "And yet, when the conspirators put a violent end to this poor exhausted spirit... the Republic gained absolutely nothing."<sup>11</sup>

Caesar's administration is unprejudiced. As Brutus says,

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9. II, ii, 65-68; 71-72.

10. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 215.

11. Ibid., p. 228.

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To be elected to fill vacancies and to elect  
 Brutus, to fill them Caesar will not come;  
 The cause is in my will, I will not come;  
 That is enough to satisfy the Senate.

Thus Caesar in reality is the sole power in Rome. He is represented by Shakespeare as only qualified to rule according to ancient custom and standards. As MacGillivray says things, Caesar, with his transcendent gifts, was chosen by Providence to preserve the Roman State from shipwreck, and steer it on its triumphant course; and even if the helmsman erred, the course was set. To be sure, he does have personally weaknesses, but certainly these do not alter his ability as an able and successful governor. This minor weakness or decline in the man is obviously (as we have seen from previous discussion) not valid or reasonable grounds for eliminating, as do the assassins, the monarchic institution which he represents. As MacGillivray again points out, "And yet, when the conspirators put a violent end to this poor exhausted spirit... the Republic gained absolutely nothing."<sup>11</sup> Caesar's character is unrepentant. As Brutus says,

9. II, ii, 85-88; VI-72.  
 10. MacGillivray, op. cit., p. 215.  
 11. Ibid., p. 228.



"To speak the truth of Caesar, I have not known when his affections swayed more than his reason." <sup>12</sup> Caesar himself confirms this belief when he resolves to execute justice according to the law in spite of Metullus' attempts to sway him with flattery. In accord with the accepted formula for rule, Caesar places the welfare of the people above his own. Moulton states with plausibility that "Advancing individuality implies increasing differentiation...we may expect to find at last an individual taking the form of service, of entire devotion to the ideal of the state. So it is with the Caesar of this play." <sup>13</sup> He has his own personal interests, but as MacCallum indicates such interests are legitimate provided that his more selfish aims coincide with the good of the whole, <sup>14</sup> and provided he has the intellect and will to satisfy the needs of the time--which he has. Above all else, however, Caesar's attitude toward the common people, in contrast to that of Coriolanus, definitely renders him qualified for rule. The fatherly affection, prevalent in Caesar, is not found in Coriolanus. He was noblest of the Romans, devoted to her cause; he sympathized with her poor. In the oft quoted passages of Antony, "When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept..." <sup>15</sup> Also Plutarch: "Now Caesar immediately won many mens good willes at Rome, through his eloquence, in pleading

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12. II, i, 19-20.

13. Moulton, op. cit., p. 126.

14. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 228.

15. III, ii, 96.

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12. II, 1, 19-20.  
 13. Montford, op. cit., p. 130.  
 14. MacGillivray, op. cit., p. 132.  
 15. III, 1, 95.



of their causes: and the people loved him marvelously also, because (sic) of the courteous manner he had to speake to every man..."<sup>16</sup> In addition to this benevolent justice, Phillips cites Calpurnia's interpretation of the omens as a suggestion or indication that Caesar was, as Tudor theorists believed all kings to be, the divinely appointed lieutenant of God on earth.<sup>17</sup>

When beggars die there are no comets seen;  
The heavens themselves blaze forth the  
death of princes.<sup>18</sup>

MacCallum is of the same mind. "Such men," he said, "are ministers of the Divine Purposes, as Plutarch said in regard to Caesar...the inspiration that made him an instrument of Heaven and that was to bring peace and order to the world."<sup>19</sup>

The principles of order necessary, according to sixteenth century theorists, for civil health are prevalent within the state. The component degrees of society have arrayed themselves in proper order under one authority--Caesar. "The throng that follows Caesar at the heels, of senators, of praetors, common suitors."<sup>20</sup>

In spite of all this, the conspirators feel that such order is not good; they are opposed to monarchy, which Caesar represents. Cassius believes this form of government to be

16. Plutarch, Life of Julius Caesar, trans. by Thomas North, p. 270.

17. Phillips, op. cit., p. 179.

18. II, ii, 30.

19. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 229-30.

20. II, iv, 34.

of their causes: and the people loved him passionately also,  
because (etc) of the courteous manner he used to speak to every  
man... In addition to this benevolent justice, Phillips  
also Calverton's interpretation of the poem as a suggestion  
or indication that Caesar was, as Luther characteristically believed,  
kings to be, the divinely appointed lieutenant of God on  
earth. 17

When he says that there are no common men;  
The highest of men is high for the  
deeds of princes. 18

MacCallum is of the same mind. "Such men," he said, "are  
ministers of the Divine Purpose," as Winthrop said in regard to  
Caesar... the inscription that was in the heart of Heaven  
and that was to bring peace and order to the world." 19

The principles of order necessarily, according to Winthrop  
century theorists, for civil order is prevalent within the  
state. The common danger of society have always been  
active in proper order and not in anarchy--Caesar. "The  
strong that follow Caesar at the heels, of necessity, of  
necessity, common authors." 20

In spite of all this, the conspirators feel that such  
order is not good; they are opposed to order, which Caesar  
represents. Cassius believes this form of government to be

16. Finckh, Life of Julius Caesar, trans. by Thomas North,  
p. 270.  
17. Phillips, op. cit., p. 179.  
18. II, 11, 30.  
19. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 229-30.  
20. II, 11, 34.



unnatural and so indicates to Casca: "I was born free as Caesar; so were you. And this man is now become a God....,"<sup>21</sup> Cassius at first might appear as a staunch supporter of the political (republican) cause. But upon closer examination his theory of government and his political ideas are faintly suggestive of and similar to the subversive elements found everywhere today. He might well be called a prototype of Communism. He believed in idealized equality, equality as can exist only in an individual's dreaming. He thinks that all individuals must be equal regardless of qualifications or abilities. His doctrine of liberty rests upon the simple axiom that every man, by the mere fact of his existence, is equal to every other. Such a belief is so obviously erroneous that it needs no refutation. MacCallum indicates that this feeling on the part of Cassius is more personal than political. "It is now resentment of pre-eminence that makes Cassius a malcontent."<sup>22</sup>

Brutus' convictions are sincere; he has the welfare of the state at heart. As Antony says:

All the conspirators, save only he,  
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;<sup>23</sup>

A number of Brutus' statements are indicative of this: "Not that I loved Caesar less but that I loved Rome more." And again to Cassius, "If it be aught toward the general good."<sup>24</sup>

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21. I, iii, 76-78.

22. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 278.

23. V, v, 69-72.

24. I, ii, 85.

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that this feeling on the part of Caesar is very personal  
than political. "It is now resentment of pre-eminence that  
moves Caesar's malcontent." 22

Caesar's convictions are sincere; he has the weight of  
the state at heart. As Antony says:  
At the conspirators, saw only he;  
Did that they did in envy of great Caesar; 23

A number of Brutus' statements are indicative of this: "Not  
that I loved Caesar less but that I loved Rome more."  
again to Caesar, "If it be meant toward the general good." 24

21. I, 111, 70-78.  
22. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 278.  
23. V, v, 69-72.  
24. I, 11, 82.



Finally, to the people he remarked, "With this I depart, that, as I slew my best lover for the good of Rome, I have the same dagger for myself, when it shall please my country to need my death." <sup>25</sup>

Richard Moulton points out that the action of the play shows state versus individual. This is apparent when Brutus though reaching the conclusion that Caesar is innocent nevertheless decides to slay him. Expediency and the state here overshadow the claims and rights of the individual. The conspirators' claim to righteousness was--to be men that gave their country liberty. Liberty for them meant to free Rome from Caesar who sought power only for Rome and to submit in turn this state to those who sought power for themselves. Moulton sees the irresistible advance of popular claims eventuating in the empire. <sup>26</sup>

The desire of Brutus for Caesar's removal is definitely based on the welfare of the state. His idea is to restore the order under which Rome was governed before Caesar came to power. Though not definite, it seems fairly obvious that the ruling authority be preserved in the hands of the nobility. It seems evident that he had no intention of delegating the power to the commoners. MacCallum offers support to this belief. "Of the positive essence of republicanism, of enthusiasm for a state in which all lawful authority is

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25. III, ii, 49-52.

26. Moulton, op. cit., p. 128.

Finally, to the people be remembered, With this I depart, that  
as I show my best love for the good of them, I have the same  
danger for myself, when it shall please my country to need  
my death. 25

Richard Montan notes out some the action of the day  
shows that various individuals. This is apparent when we  
though reaching the conclusion that Caesar is innocent never-  
theless decided to slay him. Expediency and the state law  
overshadow the claims and rights of the individuals. The  
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The desire of Marcus for Caesar's removal is definitely  
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enthusiasm for a state in which all laws authority is

25. III, 44, 49-52.  
26. Montan, op. cit., p. 128.



derived from the whole body of fully qualified citizens, there is...no trace whatever in any of his [Brutus] utterances..."<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, in Act II Brutus indicates that he feels political rule should not be relegated to one man alone.<sup>28</sup>

Phillips believes that here Brutus distinguishes between a ruler endowed with authority from on high and a ruler who possesses sovereignty in himself.<sup>29</sup> In short, limited versus absolute monarchy. Brutus feels that Caesar's power is delegated and limited by the Senate. His argument is fundamentally the same as the Renaissance argument for limited monarchy.

In theory Caesar's government represents limited monarchy. Likewise Brutus apparently admires Caesar both as a man and ruler.<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, Caesar observes the claims of established order. Yet Brutus feels that moved by ambition Caesar will reject this system.

That lowliness is young Ambition's ladder,  
...when he once attains the upmost round,  
He then unto the ladder turns his back,  
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees  
By which he did ascend.<sup>31</sup>

Brutus believes that 'the crown which Caesar seeks will make him an absolute monarch, no longer a ruler limited by a sovereign body. Power will be transferred from the Senate to

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27. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 203.

28. II, i, 10-34.

29. Phillips, op. cit., p. 181.

30. II, i, 20.

31. II, i, 21-27.

derived from the whole body of fully qualified citizens, there  
is...no trace whatever in any of his (Luther's) utterances...  
On the other hand, in Act II Luther indicated that he feels  
political rule should not be restricted to one man alone.  
Political parties that have become distinguished between a  
ruler endowed with authority from on high and a ruler who  
possesses sovereignty in himself. In short, limited versus  
absolute monarchy. Luther feels that Caesar's power is  
delimited and limited by the Senate. His argument is  
fundamentally the same as the Renaissance argument for limited  
monarchy.

In theory Caesar's government represents a limited monarchy.  
Likewise Luther apparently admits Caesar both as a man and  
ruler. 30 Admittedly, Caesar survives the claims of  
established order. Yet Luther feels that even by ambition  
Caesar will reject this system.

That lowliness is your ambition's ladder,  
...when he once reaches the utmost round,  
he then turns the ladder under his back,  
looks in the clouds, scornful of those horses  
by which he did ascend. 31

Luther believes that the crown which Caesar seeks will make  
him an absolute monarch, no longer a ruler limited by a  
sovereign body. Power will be transferred from the Senate to

- 37. MacCullum, op. cit., p. 203.
- 38. II, i, 10-14.
- 39. Philippi, op. cit., p. 181.
- 40. II, i, 20.
- 41. II, i, 21-27.



his own person, thus altering the political structure of society. Sir Mark Hunter states that "To Brutus at one point it would almost seem that the forbidden thing was not so much the actual fact of kingship as the name and symbol of royal rule." <sup>32</sup> Caesar with the attainment of the crown might run unchecked to any lengths.

...that what he is, augmented,  
Would run to these and these extremities;  
...would, as his kind, grow mischievous, <sup>33</sup>

Violence in this case, believes Brutus, is justified because the welfare of the state demands it. He maintains that the prevention of such an accession serves the common good. "I know no personal cause to spurn at him but for the general." <sup>34</sup> Brutus believes that no half measures will suffice. Death he feels is the only way to avert the personal supremacy of Caesar. Does the mere future contingency (and that is what it is) justify the infliction of death? All this was merely a hazardous conclusion drawn from doubtful premises.

It is a well known fact that Caesar crossed the Rubicon; he entered Rome as a conqueror; he placed the Gauls in the senate. Thus Palmer believes that Caesar is already a full-blown tyrant, but that Brutus is so obsessed by a horror of kingship, by the republican traditions of his family, and by the possible evils which may follow upon the violation of a

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32. Hunter, op. cit., p. 120.

33. II, i, 30-33.

34. II, i, 11-12.





theory of government that he takes no account of these realities. 35

Thus we see society operating in accord with the universal law--all degrees and orders in harmony. We also see a group convinced that the present political regime under Caesar is a menace to society and for the good of all must be eliminated. Shakespeare, with no apparent prejudice, in the light of the welfare of society resolves the problem.

Caesar is assassinated. The results are disastrous and the fallacy of the conspirators' political reasoning is shown. With the ruling head gone, Rome speeds toward destruction. MacCallum says, "Brutus has brought about an upturn of society by assassinating the one man who could organize that society."<sup>36</sup> Through Antony, Shakespeare shows the significance of this deed:

A curse shall light upon the limbs of men;  
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife  
Shall cumber all the parts of Italy; <sup>37</sup>

Antony observed, as did the sixteenth century theorists, that civil chaos results from the violent removal of lawful authority. He realizes that the commonwealth was torn in pieces as a result of tampering with the divine structure of the state.

The multiple authority which followed Caesar's death is

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- 35. Palmer, op. cit., p. 7.
  - 36. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 263.
  - 37. III, i, 262-75.

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Thus we see society operating in accord with the universal  
law--all degrees and orders in harmony. We also have a group  
convinced that the present political system under Caesar is  
a menace to society and for the good of all must be eliminated.  
Therefore, with no regard to expediency, in the light of the  
welfare of society by resources are provided.

Caesar is assassinated. The results are disastrous and  
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With the ruling head gone, Rome headed towards destruction.  
MacGillivray says, "Caesar has brought about an end of society  
by assassinating the one man who could organize that society."  
Through Antony, Shakespeare shows the significance of this  
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A curse shall light upon the limbs of him;  
Domestic fury and fierce civil strife  
Shall light upon his ears; he shall hear

Antony observed, as did the ancient comedy theorists, that  
civil chaos resulted from the violent removal of law  
authority. He realizes that the commonwealth was torn in  
pieces as a result of competition with the divine attributes of  
the state.  
The military authority which followed Caesar's death is

35. *Antony*, pp. 215, 216, 217.  
36. *MacGillivray*, pp. 215, 216, 217.  
37. *III*, i, 262-75.



the major cause of the fierce civil strife. Such strife in no way compares with the peace and order maintained under Caesar's monarchic government. Brutus' political philosophy is completely discredited. The results are those of which Elyot spoke in condemning aristocracy: "Some beinge ones in authorite, be incensed with glorie;...whereby they falle in to contention...and bryngeth al to confusion." <sup>38</sup> Brutus played the statesman when he had no mind or quality for the vocation. He feels compelled to kill Caesar in order to live up to assumed principles. He offered reasons to a mob which he does not understand. Shakespeare shows us that Brutus is unfit for political leadership.

Complete upheaval of order and justice brought about by the collapse of the political structure is shown by Shakespeare. Immediately after the assassination the common people, quiet and peaceful under Caesar, now become one of the principal instruments of disorder. They cry "Fire! Kill! Slay!" <sup>39</sup> in a vivid example of mob rule. As Palmer points out the citizens of Rome are so inflamed by Antony that they become an impassioned mob incapable of anything but ejaculation. <sup>40</sup> The fate of Cinna the Poet gives us a horrible picture of the injustice of the uncontrolled masses. MacCallum feels that the plebeians are represented as fickle and violent, greedy and

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38. Phillips, op. cit., p. 186.

39. III, ii, 208-9.

40. Palmer, op. cit., p. 29.

the nation cause of the latter civil strife. Such strife is no way to come with the peace and order maintained under Caesar's monarchic government. Mutual political philosophy is completely discarded. The results are those of which I spoke in condemning democracy: "Some things are in order, he increased with rights;... whether they fall in to contention... and tyrannical to contention." Brutus played the politician when he had no mind or quality for the position. He was compelled to kill Caesar in order to live as to assumed principles. He offered reasons to a man which he does not understand. Shakespeare shows us that Brutus is right for political leadership.

Complete absence of order and justice brought about by the collapse of the political structure is shown by Shakespeare. Immediately after the assassination the common people, rulers and generally under Caesar, now become one of the principles of disorder. They cry "Beware! Kill! Beware!" in a vivid example of mob rule. As Palmer points out the citizens of Rome are so infected by Antony that they become an unquestioned mob incapable of anything but reaction. The fact of course the mob gives us a horrible picture of the injustice of the uncontrolled masses. MacGillivray feels that the elections are represented as fights and violent, greedy and



irrational. They have shouted for Pompey, they strew flowers for Caesar; they can be tickled with talk of their ancient liberties, they can be cajoled by the tricks of shifty rhetoric: ...they will not hear a word against Brutus, they rush off to fire his house.<sup>41</sup>

Similar confusion exists in the upper degrees. It seldom occurs to members of the ruling class that one of themselves may lead a revolution (though that is how most revolutions begin). Antony gives voice to this idea when he expresses the opinion that Cassius is not dangerous because he is a member of the aristocracy.

Fear him not, Caesar; he's not dangerous  
He is a noble Roman and well given.<sup>42</sup>

Three aristocratic factions vie for honors at the expense of the commonwealth. Turmoil, conflict, envy, and ambition among Roman leaders are the prevailing themes--according to Renaissance thinking, the characteristic fruits of divided political authority.

Ultimately the triumvirate emerges as the sovereign authority in Rome. Ironically, at the price of civil strife, the conspirators have made way for a tyranny far worse than that which they overthrew. Antony's statement that he must "determine how to cut off some charge in legacies"<sup>43</sup> demonstrates the greed of the triumvirate at the expense of the

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41. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 216.

42. I, ii, 196-97.

43. IV, i, 8-9.

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41. MacB. I, ii, 100-101.  
 42. I, ii, 100-101.  
 43. IV, i, 8-9.



citizens and shows Antony's attitude toward the common people as compared with that of Caesar. The play, moreover, gives every indication that the evil effects of this tyranny will not soon end.

As democracy is discredited in Coriolanus, so aristocracy is discredited in Julius Caesar. If as MacCallum states, "It is really Caesar's presence, his genius, his conception that dominates the story,"<sup>44</sup> then this spirit substantiates the implied conclusion--the reaffirmation of the monarchic principle. Violation of unitary sovereignty, as represented by Caesar, was the cause of all the social and political ills. Shakespeare gives Caesar's fall meaning and significance. He is building up the concept of the political virtue of monarchy. In discrediting the aristocratic principle, it is evident that Shakespeare saw the inevitability as well as the necessity of rule by one man. The action of Julius Caesar demonstrates this necessity of monarchy.

Shakespeare shows that men in the mass do not think, they feel. They are as biddable as children, and as sensitive to suggestion. Shakespeare has been accused of bias against the populace. But is it so? He had no illusions about them. Granville-Barker says that Shakespeare as a dramatist faced their inconstant verdict day after day. Brutus has no illusions:<sup>45</sup>

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44. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 214.

45. H. Granville Barker, Preface to Shakespeare, Vol. II, p. 392.

citizens and shows Antony's attitude toward the common people as compared with that of Caesar. The play, moreover, gives every indication that the evil effects of this tyranny will not soon end.

As democracy is discredited in Coriolanus, so aristocracy is discredited in Julius Caesar. It is MacBath that is really Caesar's presence, his genius, his conception of the world and the army. It is this spirit and understanding that makes the final catastrophe of the monarchic principle. Violation of natural sovereignty, as represented by Caesar, was the cause of all the social and political ills. Shakespeare gives Caesar's fall meaning and significance. It is within the concept of the political virtue of monarchy. In discrediting the aristocratic principle, it is evident that Shakespeare saw the inevitability as well as the necessity of rule by one man. The action of Julius Caesar demonstrates this necessity of monarchy.

Shakespeare shows that men in the mass do not think, they feel. They are as childish as children, and as sensitive as women. Shakespeare has been accused of a bias against the common people. It is not so. He had no illusions about them. Transcending the fact that Shakespeare is a dramatist faced their inevitable verdict day after day. There is no

illusions: 45



Only be patient till we have appeas'd  
The multitude, beside themselves with fear...<sup>46</sup>

Brutus apparently wins the crowd not by what he says, but in spite of it. Thus it is fairly obvious that the drama portrays a feeling, yet little thinking citizenry.

Prior to Antony's conversion of the citizens, they are not a mob, but a group of men each of whom is accessible to reproach. This kindly group, as portrayed in the first two acts of the drama, is a far cry from the mob which Antony lets loose upon the city after his oration. Antony's citizens are fused into a horde, which has neither reason nor pity. It has no purpose other than to destroy.

It has been said that Shakespeare demonstrated that a crowd is so fickle that it cannot keep anything in mind for more than a moment and that it is easily swayed and is incapable of any act which requires concentration. Numerous critics feel that Shakespeare seized with avidity upon every instance of the brutality of the masses. In the scene in which the mob murdered Cinna the poet, all four citizens are alike in their bloodthirsty fury. It is true that no more vivid picture has ever been drawn of the fickle, inflammable temper of a crowd; yet Shakespeare had no personal dislike for the common people. All popular rule, however, he did dislike; it was repugnant to him because it was rule exercised by the unqualified. On this basis Shakespeare was sensitive to the

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46. III, i, 179-80.





reactions of the common people. When they attempted to take authority unto themselves, they thus violated a tenet of sixteenth century belief. Violence and civil war usually followed such behavior. In this instance we have no exception. Shakespeare, however, was truly aware of the essential difference between a mob and the persons of whom it is composed. As a mob they are ready to burn down the house of Brutus in a fit of passion, but Palmer says that "the time will come when as individuals they will again become amenable to argument." 47

other than personal opinion. Whether Shakespeare did or did not have aristocratic tendencies is surely a matter of conjecture; for proof, definite and conclusive, is not, and can not be offered on this topic. Personal beliefs and individual convictions garnered from the plays themselves, and research necessarily limited through a lack of concrete evidence are all that can be had.

According to Houston the three most prominent plays which seem to point to the political evolution in which the ideal of the state and the outer life gradually yields to the life within and the claims of the individual are Coriolanus (1608), Julius Caesar (1601), and Anthony and Cleopatra (1607).<sup>4</sup>

In Coriolanus one views aristocracy and democracy in conflict. This conflict is the result of confusion offered to

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47. Palmer, op. cit., p. 31.

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#### IV. Coriolanus

To state with any degree of aplomb that Shakespeare was an aristocrat, or, on the other hand, that his sympathies were with the proletariat would indeed be the utterance of a fool. Opinions in this regard are numerous. None, however, can make the bold assertion that their beliefs are based on anything other than personal opinion. Whether Shakespeare did or did not have aristocratic tendencies is purely a matter of conjecture; for proof, definite and conclusive, is not, and can not be offered on this topic. Personal beliefs and individual surmisings garnered from the plays themselves, and research necessarily limited through a lack of concrete evidence are all that can be had.

According to Moulton the three most prominent plays which seem to point to the political evolution in which the ideal of the state and the outer life gradually yields to the life within and the claims of the individual are Coriolanus (1608), Julius Caesar (1601), and Antony and Cleopatra (1607).<sup>1</sup>

In Coriolanus one views aristocracy and democracy in conflict. This conflict is the result of concession offered to

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1. Moulton, op. cit., p. 112.

#### IV. Coriolanus

To state with any degree of solemnity that Coriolanus was an aristocrat, or, on the other hand, that his sympathies were with the proletariat would indeed be the utterance of a fool. Opinions in this regard are numerous. None, however, can make the bold assertion that their beliefs are based on anything other than personal opinion. Whichever speaker did or did not have aristocratic tendencies is purely a matter of conjecture: for proof, definite and conclusive, is not, and can not be offered on this topic. Personal beliefs and individual sympathies gathered from the plays themselves, and research necessarily limited through a lack of concrete evidence are all that can be had.

According to Hamilton the three most prominent plays which seem to point to the political evolution in which the ideas of the state and the individual gradually yields to the state

within and the status of the individual are Coriolanus (1608), Julius Caesar (1609), and Timon of Athens (1607).<sup>1</sup>

In Coriolanus the view aristocracy and democracy in conflict. This conflict is the result of concession offered to

1. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 112.



the citizens of Rome. Political unrest and economic upheaval forced the Senate to grant representation to the people.

Moulton believes that the only ideal as depicted in Coriolanus is the ideal of the state to which everything in a sense is subservient or secondary, while the spirit of individuality begins to flare with pronounced effect. Thus we have here the beginnings of a struggle between pure political principle and compromise (concession to the individual).<sup>2</sup>

Here in Coriolanus (and in the entire history of Rome) critics who argued in defense of monarchy found tangible evidence of the dangers of democratic government. William Fulbecke in his Pandectes cites Coriolanus to demonstrate that the people are a "beast of many heads," a "bundle of thorns, which will beare up a great man, but will pricke him if he leane or lie upon it." He contends, from evidence such as found in Coriolanus, that a democracy is contrary to the natural law.<sup>3</sup>

Phillips believes that Shakespeare in this portion of Roman history writes in fundamentally the same spirit. "In Coriolanus he (Shakespeare) examines a democratic state, and, by the standards of civil organization which he seems consistently to have adopted, finds it wanting."<sup>4</sup> Politically,

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2. Ibid., p. 113.

3. Phillips, op. cit., p. 147.

4. Ibid., p. 148.

the citizens of Rome. Political unrest and economic depression forced the Senate to grant representation to the people. Montesquieu believes that the only ideal as depicted in Coriolanus is the ideal of the state to which everything in a sense is subservient or secondary, while the spirit of individuality begins to flare with pronounced effect. Thus we have here the beginnings of a struggle between pure political principle and compromise (concession to the individual).

Here in Coriolanus (and in the entire history of Rome) critics who seemed in distress of monarchy found facile evidence of the danger of democratic government. William Shakespeare in his Coriolanus does demonstrate that the people are a "swarm of many heads," a "rabble of thorns, which will wear up a great man, but will prick him if he leans on his upon it." He contends, then evidence such as found in Coriolanus, that a democracy is contrary to the natural law.

Shakespeare believes that there were in this portion of Roman history writes in fundamentally the same spirit. "In Coriolanus he (Shakespeare) examines a democratic state, and by the standards of civil organization which he seems consistently to have adopted, finds it wanting." <sup>4</sup> Politically,

2. Ibid., p. 113.
3. Philos., op. cit., p. 107.
4. Ibid., p. 113.



the play would appear to be a dramatic picture of a state upset. This disturbance is the result of man's forsaking a spiritual pattern supposedly ordained by God.

Moulton thinks this story deals with contests between political parties--patricians and plebeians.<sup>5</sup> These parties, however, differ from the Whig and Tory, or the Democratic and Republican, as we know them today. These latter labor on different platforms and offer different ideas in striving for a common good, while for both the patricians and the plebeians there is but one ideal, that of service to the state. In this regard Moulton states..."to this ideal the patrician party is wholly devoted, as typified by such leaders as Titus Lartius or the incomparable Coriolanus."<sup>6</sup> He further states that the plebeians as they appear in this drama have no ideals of their own and little or no regard for duty. They "cannot rule, nor ever will be ruled; their affections are a sick man's appetite, who desires most that which would increase his evil."<sup>7</sup> The disparaging remarks cast at him by their scornful opponents seem to parallel their (plebeian) actions, as we see the mob stealing away at the first word of war, and even those so inclined to fight devote their interest towards less valiant things at the first chance of petty spoil. Menenius strikes the key-note of the whole play with the famous Fable of the

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5. Moulton, op. cit., p. 114.

6. Ibid., p. 114.

7. Idem.

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political parties--Republicans and Democrats. <sup>5</sup> These parties,

however, differ from the White and Tory, or the Democratic and

Republican, as we know them today. These latter labor on

different objectives and offer different ideas in striving for

a common good, while for both the Republicans and the Democrats

there is but one ideal, that of service to the state. In this

regard Houston states: "...to this ideal the partisan party is

wholly devoted, as testified by such leaders as James Harrison

of the inconvertible Republicans." <sup>6</sup> He further states that the

Democrats as they appear in this drama have no leaders of their

own and little or no regard for duty. They "cannot rule, nor

ever will be ruled; their allusions are a sick man's supposition,

who desires most just what would increase his evil." <sup>7</sup> The

disparaging remarks cast at him by their scornful opponents

seem to parallel their (Democrats) actions, as we see the men

appearing away at the first word of war, and even choose to

incline to fight before their interest towards each other

thins at the first chance of petty rivalry. Houston strikes

the key-note of the whole play with the famous words of the

5. Houston, op. cit., p. 114.

6. Ibid., p. 114.

7. Ibid.



Belly and Members. The belly and the members are not coordinate limbs of the body; the sum and substance of this parable is that the belly is the state, and the members, to the extent they are not serving the belly, are disturbers of the general health of the physical or political body.<sup>8</sup> Partially right, Moulton's ideas need to be greatly tempered.

There have been many attempts by numerous critics to consider the play, Coriolanus, as a demonstration that Shakespeare was pro-aristocratic or the reverse, that this was a special plea for one particular class or party, that the political message of this play was a denunciation of the common people.

Not a few critics have assumed that in this play and elsewhere Shakespeare's sympathies were on the patrician rather than on the popular side. Hazlitt says that he seems "To have spared no occasion of baiting the rabble."<sup>9</sup> And again, "This is the logic of the imagination which seeks to heap contempt on misery, to raise power into tyranny, and to make tyranny absolute."<sup>10</sup> Barrett Wendell sees in this play an underlying mood strangely akin to one of political or social philosophy; and a philosophy too of a grim, repellent kind. "Nowhere can we feel more distinctly why to some modern philanthropic dreamers Shakespeare, for all his art, presents himself as a colossal

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8. Ibid., p. 116.

9. W.J. Rolfe, Coriolanus., p. 10.

10. A.H. Tolman, Falstaff and other Shakespearean Topics, p. 23.

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8. ibid., p. 115.  
9. ibid., p. 115.  
10. ibid., p. 115.  
11. ibid., p. 115.  
12. ibid., p. 115.



enemy, as a tradition which advancing humanity ought ruthlessly to overthrow." <sup>11</sup> He goes on to say that no work in literature more truly expounds the inherent danger and evil of democracy; nor does any show less recognition of the numerous benefits which our country believes to counterbalance them. He thinks that here in Coriolanus we finally find Shakespeare with almost cynical coldness artistically expounding the inherent weakness of moral nobility, the inherent strength and power of all that is intellectually and morally vile. <sup>12</sup>

Shakespeare is an aristocrat. This George Brandes asserts without vacillation and without the slightest apparent doubt. He says that Shakespeare certainly did not perceive that it was the spirit of enterprise of the middle class that constituted the strength of England under Elizabeth. He regarded his age from the point of view of a man who was accustomed to see in princely young noblemen the very height of humanity, the patrons of all lofty effort, and the performers of all great achievements. He continues by saying that Shakespeare's aversion to the mob had its deepest roots in the purely physical repugnance of his artist nerves to their plebeian atmosphere. To him the Tribunes of the people were but political agitators of the lowest type, mere personifications of the envy of the masses, and representatives of their stupidity. Again and again he insists, by means of his hero's

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11. Wendell, op. cit., p. 333.

12. Ibid., p. 334.

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of the envy of the masses, and representatives of their

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11. Wendell, op. cit., p. 333.

12. Ibid., p. 334.



passionate invective, on the cowardice of the people. Upon a stress on the wretched pusillanimity of the plebeians, his detestation of the mass thrived.<sup>13</sup>

With consummate boldness he continues, "This much, at any rate, can be declared with absolute certainty, that the anti-democratic spirit and passion of the play sprang from no momentary political situation, but from Shakespeare's heart of hearts."<sup>14</sup> Many passages, he states, prove that it was, in plain words, their evil smell which repelled Shakespeare. The good qualities and virtues of the people do not exist for him; he believes their sufferings to be either imaginary or induced by their own shortcomings. Their struggles are ridiculous to him, and their rights a fiction; their only real passion is an innate, deep, and concentrated hatred of their superiors; but all these qualities are merged in this chief crime: they stink.<sup>15</sup>

For the mutable rank-scented many, let them  
 Regard me as I do not flatter, and  
 Therein behold themselves.<sup>16</sup>

When Coriolanus is banished by the people he turns upon them with the outburst:

You common cry of curs whose breath I hate  
 As reek o' the rotten fine, whose loves I prize  
 As the dead carcasses of unburied men  
 That do corrupt my air.<sup>17</sup>

13. Brandes, op. cit., p. 536.

14. Ibid., p. 536.

15. Ibid., p. 537.

16. III, i, 66-68.

17. III, iii, 119-23.

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With consummate boldness he confided, "This much, at any  
rate, can be obtained with absolute certainty, that the anti-  
democratic spirit and passion of the day spring from no  
necessary political situation, not from Johnson and his party  
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position is an isolated, deep, and concentrated hatred of their  
superiors; and all these qualities are merged in this chief  
emotion: they think. 15

For the mutely rank-seated many, far than  
Regard me as I do not flatter, and  
Therein behold themselves. 16

When Johnson is finished by the people he turns upon  
them with the outbreak:

You common cry of ours whose treason I hate  
as rank of the rotten line, whose loves I prize  
as the dead corpses of quivering men  
That do corrupt my air. 17

- 13. Shakespeare, op. cit., p. 236.
- 14. Ibid., p. 236.
- 15. Ibid., p. 237.
- 16. Ibid., p. 66-68.
- 17. Ibid., pp. 119-21.



For the people Shakespeare felt nothing but scorn, thinks Brandes, and he was incapable of seeing them as separate individualities. Humanity in general was to him not millions of individuals, but a few great entities amidst millions of non-entities. He believed that the existence of these few illustrious men was all that made life worth living. His impression of the circumstances and conditions of life is this: there must of necessity be formed around the solitary great ones of this earth a conspiracy of envy and hatred raised by the small and the mean. As Coriolanus says, "Who deserves greatness, deserves your hate." <sup>18</sup>

Brandes continues: Shakespeare felt, as seen in Julius Caesar, that all popular rule--even that which was guided by genius--was repugnant, inasmuch as it was power exercised, directly or indirectly, by an ignorant herd.

As far as Coriolanus is concerned, the popular party is simply the body of those who "cannot rule nor ever will be ruled." <sup>19</sup> That Shakespeare held the same political views as Coriolanus is amply shown by the fact that the most dissimilar characters approve of them in every respect. Menenius' description of the tribunes is synonymous with that of Marcius. "Our very priests must become mockers, if they shall encounter such ridiculous subjects as you are." <sup>20</sup>

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18. Brandes, op. cit., p. 546.

19. III, i, 40.

20. II, i, 90-92.





As a parting shot, Brandes says, "We must actually put on blinders not to see on which side Shakespeare's sympathies lie. Coriolanus, who is never refuted or contradicted, says no more than what the poet in his own person would endorse." <sup>21</sup>

Such expressions of contempt for the plebeians, as here presented, are tempered by a sympathetic presentation of the people's grievances and their obvious resentment against Coriolanus. Evidence of this kind has prompted still other critics to consider the theme of the play to be a denouncement of dictatorship.

A. H. Tolman believes that Shakespeare, at the time he wrote this play, was antagonistic towards the idea of a republic and the democratic spirit. He maintains that though Shakespeare scorned the demagogues, Brutus and Secinius most of all, he still felt little sympathy for the intractable Coriolanus. Shakespeare's natural affinities were with the nobility; his usual ideal of government was despotic rule; his general attitude towards society was plainly aristocratic. But his genius lies primarily in the fact that he would not accept the restrictions of any one set of men, nor a single point of view. Shakespeare was without doubt supreme in expressing the truth about human nature and society. <sup>22</sup>

Coriolanus, a figure that occupies a great deal of space,

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21. Brandes, op. cit., p. 542.

22. Tolman, op. cit., p. 38.

As a parting shot, Brandes says, "we must actually put on blinders not to see on which side Shakespeare's sympathies lie. Coriolanus, who is never tainted or contradicted, says no more than what the poet in his own person would endorse." 21

Such expressions of respect for the poet, as here presented, are tinged by a sympathetic presentation of the poet's attitude and their own sense of right and wrong. Coriolanus, whether of this kind has prompted still other critics to consider the theme of the play to be a demonstration of dictatorship.

A. H. Towner believes that Shakespeare, at the time he wrote this play, was sympathetic towards the idea of a republic and the democratic spirit. He maintains that though Shakespeare admired the discipline, order and discipline of the state, he still left little sympathy for the inhumanity of Coriolanus. Shakespeare's general attitude was with the nobility; his ideal of government was despotic rule; his general attitude towards society was mainly aristocratic. But his genius lies primarily in the fact that he would not accept the restrictions of any one set of men, not a single point of view. Shakespeare was without doubt supreme in expressing the truth about human nature and society. 22

Coriolanus, a figure that dominates a great deal of history,

21. Brandes, *op. cit.*, p. 242.  
22. Towner, *op. cit.*, p. 38.



is at no point allowed anything that even remotely resembles charm. "He is in a state of stupid tutelage, and remains a boy to the end," says Lewis.<sup>23</sup> Essentially his training permits of no development: throughout life he remains the rigid and hypnotized schoolboy taught and influenced by a violent mother, and given destructive ideas which he mesmerically pursues. No amount of physical courage can compensate for the defects of dullness and meanness inherent in him.

A third group of critics alienated by these apparent inconsistencies and obviously unable to solve them, give all their effort to the admiration of Shakespeare's impartiality.

Clark believed Shakespeare to have been far above the distinctions of class and rank.<sup>24</sup> Though I do not agree entirely with this, I am convinced that though he vigorously reproaches the unpredictable mob, he makes no special plea in behalf of the hero of the play. Quite to the contrary, he shows Coriolanus to have only one redeeming quality--courage. This courage lay hidden and obscure beneath numerous and gross faults.

MacCallum conceives the whole political situation as made up of three groups. On one side is the despised and famished populace, driven by its misery to seek power which it cannot use. On the other side is the prejudiced, disorganized aristocracy, once competent, but now not very efficient.

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23. Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, p. 202.

24. Charles C. Clark, Shakespeare Characters, p. 150.

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MacGillivray conceives the whole political situation as made  
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 aristocracy, once competent, but now not very efficient.

<sup>23</sup> *William Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, p. 212.*  
<sup>24</sup> *Charles C. Clark, Shakespeare's Characters, p. 130.*



Finally, there is the great aristocrat, corrupted by pride and other equally dangerous qualities. Shakespeare's attitude towards all of these is both critical and sympathetic. Such being the case, Coleridge's verdict seems to be the best suited. "This play illustrates the wonderfully philosophic impartiality of Shakespeare's politics." <sup>25</sup> "Coriolanus has often been regarded as a drama of principles rather than of character. But Shakespeare's supreme preoccupation is always with his fable, which explains, and is explained by, human nature in action. He does not set out to commend or censure a precept or a theory. Of course the life of men is concerned with such matters, and he could not exclude them without being untrue to his aim." <sup>26</sup> MacCallum goes on to say that Shakespeare is an artist, not a moralist; and he wrote for the story, not the moral.

Since in all Shakespeare's dramas the ethical considerations cannot be excluded; so too in a play such as Coriolanus political considerations cannot be ignored. Shakespeare is bound to appreciate conditions as he imagines them, and in so doing not to violate the political principles upon which society is founded.

For the sake of clarification let us pause here. Some might say, "Shakespeare is impersonal; how can he be held responsible?" The word "impersonal" according to Webster means

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25. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 472.

26. Ibid., p. 468.

Finally, there is the great aristocrat, contrasted by his and other socially dangerous qualities. Shakespeare's attitude towards all of these is both critical and sympathetic. In the case of Coriolanus, Coriolanus's verdict seems to be the best. "This play illustrates the wonderfully philosophical superiority of Shakespeare's politics." <sup>25</sup> Coriolanus has often been regarded as a drama of principle rather than of character. But Shakespeare's serious preoccupation is always with his hero, which explains, and is explained by, his nature in action. He does not set out to condemn or condemn a certain type of man. He shows the life of man in connection with such matters, and he could not exclude them without being untrue to his aim. <sup>26</sup> Macbeth goes on to say that Shakespeare is an artist, not a moralist; and he wrote for the story, not the moral.

Since in all Shakespeare's dramas the ethical considerations cannot be excluded; so too in a play such as Coriolanus political considerations cannot be ignored. Shakespeare is bound to represent conditions as he imagines them, and in so doing not to violate the ethical principles upon which society is founded.

For the sake of clarification let us quote here some might say, "Shakespeare is immoral; how can he be held responsible?" The word "immoral" according to Webster means

<sup>25</sup> Macbeth, act. i, l. 112.  
<sup>26</sup> Ibid., act. i, l. 112.



without personal connection, or not having personality. Thus it is actually as impossible (and undesirable) for an author to be "impersonal" as it is for a baby (barring unnatural cases) to be neither a boy, nor a girl, but just a baby. When I say that Shakespeare could not have been impersonal, I also do not intend to infer that he hid behind the pages of his works and stalked his prey. Definitely not; I mean to show that Shakespeare did have ideas on the matter at hand and must have reached some conclusion. Doubtless, as is the case with all writers, he drew on the stores of his experience as well as his imagination in embellishing his subject. In dealing with the tragedy of a proud and unpopular hero, very possibly he would be helped by his knowledge of the tragedy of a proud and unpopular worthy of his own time. In dealing with a mother and her influence and reverence of a son very probably thoughts of his own home hovered before his mind. Such is the case, I believe, all the way down the line. In this sense, then, Shakespeare was dramatically objective. It is the story that comes first. These experiences are utilized in the interest of the play; the play is not utilized in the interest of the experiences. So we see that though Shakespeare may, and invariably does, treat crowds of citizens, and regards them as unfit to rule, he, by no means, hates them. He believes obviously that the governing should be done by the aristocratic classes. Yet, while to him the rule of the "commons" is impossible, he also recognizes that nobles may be

without personal connection, or not having personal life. Thus it is actually an impossible (and unrealistic) for an author to be "impersonal" as it is for a body (having an actual case) to be neither a boy, nor a girl, but just a body. When I say that Shakespeare could not have been impersonal, I also do not intend to imply that he had wanted to "possess" his works and attacked his story. Definitely not; I mean to show that Shakespeare did have ideas on the matter at hand and must have reached some conclusion. Doubtless, as in the case with all writers, he drew on the stores of his experience as well as his imagination in establishing his subject. In dealing with the tragedy of a good and ungodly hero, very naturally he would be helped by his knowledge of the tragedy of a good and ungodly worthy of his own time. In dealing with a mother and her father and revealing of a son very probably thoughts of his own home hovered before his mind. Such is the case, I believe, all the way down the line. In this sense, then, Shakespeare was drastically objective. It is the story that comes first. These experiences are realized in the interest of the play; the play is not realized in the interest of the experience. So we see that though Shakespeare was and inevitably does, great words of citizens, and perhaps then as well to rule, he, by no means, notes that. He believes obviously that the experience should be done by the aristocratic class. Yet, while to him the rule of the "common" is impossible, he also recognizes that action may be



unequal to the task. It is easy to imagine a society in which the masses are not yet ripe for self-government, and in which the classes are no longer able to steer the state.

Phillips believes that this very impartiality, of which we speak above, suggests that Shakespeare's main interest is not in the privileges of a special class, but in the welfare of the whole state.<sup>27</sup> Horn states that "In Coriolanus, almost every character taking part is in the wrong..., but the idea of state and country stands forth predominant."<sup>28</sup> The activities of the people, the tyranny of Coriolanus, the misrule of the Senate are all presented in terms of their effect on the welfare of the body politic. In Coriolanus, Shakespeare exhibits the consequences of violation of the principles by which a healthy political society is maintained. The conflict between the classes which imperils the state he constantly emphasizes. The nobility of Coriolanus is heightened, yet all of his bad qualities which disqualify him for rule, such as arrogance, false pride, and lack of concern for the common people are clearly portrayed in the play. Such a procedure excuses much of the action of the plebeians, but by presenting the tribunes as of low character and motive, Shakespeare unveils his feelings towards what he believes evil in the attempt of people to solve their grievances by

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27. Phillips, op. cit., 148.

28. F. Horn, "Shakespeare Schauspiele Erlautert" in Coriolanus, H.H. Furness ed., p. 669.

unusual to the task. It is easy to imagine a society in which the masses are not ripe for self-government, and in which the classes are no longer able to steer the state. This is the belief that this very inequality, of which we speak above, suggests that Shakespeare's main interest is not in the privileges of a special class, but in the welfare of the whole state. 27 Horn states that "in Coriolanus, almost every character taking part is in the wrong...., but the idea of state and country stands forth as dominant." 28 The activities of the people, the tyranny of Coriolanus, the misrule of the Senate are all presented in terms of their effect on the welfare of the body politic. In Coriolanus, Shakespeare exhibits the consequences of violation of the principles by which a healthy political society is maintained. The conflict between the classes which imperils the state is constantly emphasized. The nobility of Coriolanus is heightened, yet all of his bad qualities which disqualify him for rule, such as arrogance, lack of pity, and lack of concern for the common people are clearly portrayed in the play. Such a procedure excuses much of the action of the characters, but by representing the virtues as of low character and motive, Shakespeare reveals his feelings towards what he believes evil in the conduct of people to solve their problems by

27. Philippi, op. cit., 148.  
28. F. Horn, "Shakespeare's Coriolanus," in Coriolanus, U.S. Bureau of Education, 1909.



democratic method.

As shown in the first chapter, Shakespeare's contemporaries and predecessors believed that a state could prosper only when it conformed to the pattern of order, degree and vocation ordained by God and nature. Shakespeare was of like opinion. In Coriolanus, Menenius is the spokesman for this order. Dr. Johnson in Shakespeare's Roman Plays called Menenius a buffoon, but MacCallum believes that Menenius alone among all the characters possesses political wisdom and insight.<sup>29</sup> It is Menenius who exhorts all to exercise reason for the welfare of Rome. He rails against the tribunes for their attempts at upheaval. He advises Coriolanus and the people regarding their duties both as ruler and ruled. He is considered worthy and honorable by both conflicting parties. The citizens call him "Worthy Menenius Agrippa..."<sup>30</sup> The nobles respect him as an honored adviser. Menenius places general welfare before the interests of party and class. His view was a contemporary one--the good of the individual depends upon the good of the state.

Menenius Agrippa is a patrician who bears a love for the people. With him the citizens are ready to discuss matters in good faith. There is no bad blood between them and there exists, on the popular side, a readiness to consider the other fellow's point of view.<sup>31</sup>

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29. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 565.

30. I, i, 52.

31. Palmer, op. cit., p. 252, 54, 55.

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order. Dr. Johnson in *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* called

Menenius a fool, but MacCallum believes that Menenius alone

among all the characters possesses political wisdom and

insight. It is Menenius who explains all to Coriolanus' reason

for the welfare of Rome. He tells against the citizens for

their attitude at the trial. He advises Coriolanus and the

people regarding their duties both as ruler and ruled. He is

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The citizens call him "worthy Menenius" (2.1.100). The

nobles treat him as an honored adviser. Menenius places

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Menenius Agriceps is a politician who bears a love for the

people. With him the citizens are ready to discuss matters

in good faith. There is no bad blood between them and there

exists, on the common side, a readiness to consider the

other fellow's point of view. 11

22. *MacCallum, op. cit.*, p. 252.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

24. *MacCallum, op. cit.*, p. 252, 253.



Palmer considers Menenius as Shakespeare's portrait of an average member of the privileged class in any community, the speaking likeness of an English squire removed to a Roman setting. He can talk to the people as one man to another because he is entirely assured of his position. For him it is an axiom that his class is supreme in the nation by a benevolent and wholly natural dispensation of Providence. He is disposed to regard these citizens with an affectionate tolerance provided they know their place and are content to ascribe their misfortunes to heaven and not to the government of which he is a member. <sup>32</sup>

That is how Shakespeare sees the good-natured aristocrat, who can be tolerant because it never occurs to him to question his own status or that of the masses.

Menenius' idea of society conforms to the opinion of the majority current during the Renaissance. He believed in established order, degree, and vocation; he described structure as being ordained by God and nature; he felt that each and every degree had certain duties to perform which were essential to the well being of all.

Did see and hear, devise...  
And, mutually participate, did minister  
Unto the appetite and affection common  
Of the whole body. <sup>33</sup>

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32. Ibid., p. 255.

33. I, i, 105-8.

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every degree had certain duties to perform which were essential  
to the well-being of all.

Old age and heart, decline...  
And, finally, perhaps, the greatest  
into the sweet and affectionate company  
of the whole body.

155. 155. 155.  
155. 155. 155.



Among all degrees, he felt one to be ordained by nature to guide all others, one to which all degrees owe allegiance and obedience. Phillips believes that this "specialty of rule (as described by Menenius) is aristocratic in form rather than monarchic."<sup>34</sup> The latter type was preferred by the majority of Renaissance theorists, but the former was acceptable under certain conditions. Those conditions were that the few men possessing sovereignty must delegate their authority to one administrator. Menenius also feels that the Senate is a sovereign body, not a body representing a sovereign people.

No public benefit which you receive  
But it proceeds or comes from them to you  
And no way from yourselves.<sup>35</sup>

Menenius was of the opinion that Rome should be governed by those endowed by birth and education with the necessary qualities to govern--an aristocracy. Thus in Rome the Senate and consuls play the same role as the king in a monarchic state.

Because I am the store-house and the shop  
Of the whole body...  
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins  
From me receive that natural competency  
Whereby they live.<sup>36</sup>

Thus we see that the Renaissance principle of order, degree, vocation remains fundamentally the same.

In Coriolanus, then, it would seem that Shakespeare is not

34. Phillips, op. cit., p. 152.

35. I, i, 155-58.

36. I, i, 134-41. Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity,

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No public council which you receive  
But is proceeds on common things to you  
And no way from yourselves.<sup>35</sup>

Menenius was of the opinion that Rome should be governed by those endowed by birth and education with the necessary qualities to govern--an aristocracy. Thus in Rome the Senate and consuls play the same role as the king in a monarchic state.

Because I am the store-house and the shop  
Of the whole body...  
The strongest nerves and small inferior veins  
From me receive that natural commodity  
Wherewith they live.<sup>36</sup>

Thus we see that the Renaissance principle of order, hierarchy, vocation remains fundamentally the same.  
In *Coriolanus*, then, it would seem that Shakespeare is not

34. Philon, op. cit., p. 152.  
35. I, i, 152-58.  
36. I, i, 154-61.



so much concerned with aristocracy or monarchy as he is with the upheaval which follows disruption of degree and vocation. Menenius stresses that each must play his role or the whole organism will suffer. Each is dependent upon the other and all mutually participate for a common good. Menenius throughout is concerned that his fellowmen realize that any disturbances of the natural order is dangerous to the well being of all.

Those, then, intent upon disturbing the natural pattern of the state through their democratic activities are the plebeians. Many critics have written about Shakespeare's attitude toward the masses. Some state that he shows nothing but apparent contempt for their stupidity and fickleness. Stapfer states, "The dominant features of Shakespeare's plebeians...are stupidity, inconstancy and cowardliness. They are always blundering, always incapable of any political idea..." 37

The question what then is the position of the plebeian party in the conflict appears logical. They apparently have no political ideal to set up; their only demand, which to Richard Moulton is reduced to its lowest terms, is the simple right to exist. The so-called mob in one section of this story stated that meat was made for mouths and that the gods did not send corn for the rich men only. Moulton gives us an accurate insight as to his stand in this matter; he says, "The claims of the individual life are not exalted into an ideal;

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37. Paul Stapfer, Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity, trans. by E.J. Carey, p. 461.

so much concerned with industry or money-making as he is with  
the universal which follows disposition of desires and passions.  
The main concern of each man is his role in the whole  
of the world. Each is dependent upon the other and all  
mutually participate for a common good. The main business  
is concerned with his fellow-men rather than any disturbance  
of the natural order is dangerous to the well-being of all.

There, then, stands upon the natural order of  
the state through their democratic activities in the state.  
Many critics have written about Burke's attitude toward  
the masses. Some state that he shows nothing but apparent  
contempt for their stupidity and fickleness. Other states,

"The dominant feature of Burke's attitude is...  
stupidity, inconsistency and cowardliness. They are always  
hesitating, always incapable of any political ideal..."

The question what then is the position of the state  
party in the conflict between the two? They apparently have  
no political ideal to set their own demand, which is  
Richard Hooker is reduced to the lowest terms, is the simple  
right to exist. The so-called god in the position of this  
story stated that man was made for gods and that the gods  
did not send man for the rich man only. Hooker gives us an  
accurate insight as to his stand in this matter; he says, "The  
claims of the individual are not excited into an ideal;



they have come in as a disturbing force to the common ideal of the state and its service. The exact situation is that, at the opening of the action, the patricians have compromised with this disturbing claim of the individual; they have ordered distributions of corn as gratuities and not for service done;<sup>38</sup> worse than this, they have created tribunes of the people,<sup>39</sup> a perpetual mouthpiece for popular claims, and thus a disturbing force to the old single ideal of the state has been admitted within the constitution itself. Nothing but conflict can ensue; and at the height of the conflict the speech of Coriolanus--continued amid interruptions from both sides<sup>40</sup>--brings out clearly how this is a conflict between pure political principle, as Rome had understood it, and compromising recognition of popular demands."<sup>41</sup>

I would like to point out here that the man Shakespeare ridicules in his play is not the plebeian living within his own degree, but the plebeian who, through ambition, is attempting to step off his stratified plane in order to climb above on to unfamiliar and uncompromising soil. MacCallum has a discerning eye. "That is, the populace as a whole is stupid.. He (Shakespeare) therefore with perfect consistency regards them as quite unfit to rule, and when they have it or aspire to it, they cover themselves with ridicule or involve them-

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38. III, i, 120.

39. I, i, 219.

40. III, i, 91-171.

41. Moulton, op. cit., p. 116.

that there is a disturbing force to the common ideal of the fact and the service. The exact situation is that, at the opening of the action, the individuals have compromised with this disturbing state of the individual; they have ordered

disturbances of some as facilitated and not for service done; worse than this, they have created a tension of the whole.

a perpetual movement for popular claims, and this is a disturbing force to the old single ideal of the state has been admitted within the constitution itself. Noting, but conflict

can arise; and at the heart of the conflict the speech of Cordellius--continued amid interruptions from both sides--

brings out clearly how this is a conflict between pure political principles, as Rome had understood it, and compromise

with a recognition of popular demands.

I would like to point out here that the two antagonisms which are in his play is not the old-fashioned living within his own degree, but the idealism who, through action, is

attempting to stand out his strangled claims in order to claim above on to unfamiliar and uncomfortable soil. Macbeth has a discerning eye. "That is, the populace as a whole is against"

the (the) character; therefore with perfect consistency regards them as quite unfit to rule, and when they have it or aspire to it, they cover themselves with ridicule or involve them-

80. 111, 1, 120.  
81. 1, 121.  
82. 111, 1, 91-97.  
83. 111, 1, 120.



selves in crime. But this is by no means to hate them. On the contrary, he is kindly enough to individual representatives, and he certainly believes in the sacred obligation of governing them for their good." <sup>42</sup> Shakespeare speaks well of individuals of the lower class. It is only when the commoner, individually or collectively, attempts to rule that he is on the receiving end of Shakespeare's wrath. Shakespeare shows them respect when they perform their proper functions; he is aware of their rights.

In Coriolanus we see two sides of the question, both of which are justifiable. The plebeians have a legitimate argument. They have a right to receive their share of all goods. They are starving while the governing class enjoys an overabundance of food stuffs.

"...suffer us to famish and their storehouses  
cramm'd with grain...repeal daily any wholesome  
act established against the rich...If the wars  
eat us not up, they will; and there's all the  
love they bear us." <sup>43</sup>

The commoners have a right to expect proper political rule, but their consul gives them nothing but abuse.

Still, such arguments, though justifiable, are (as we have seen in the first chapter) not sufficient to overthrow the ruler and upset the normal order by taking matters of government into their own hands. The course they take to

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42. MacCallum, op. cit., p. 470.

43. I, i, 81-89.

relieve in other. But there is by no means to have done. On the  
 contrary, he is kindly enough to individual representatives,  
 and he certainly believes in the sacred obligation of governing  
 them for their good. As Shakespeare would say of individual  
 of the lower class. It is only when the nation is, individually  
 or collectively, attempts to take that he is on the receiving  
 end of Shakespeare's wrath. Shakespeare shows them respect  
 when they behave fairly toward England; he is aware of their  
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In Coriolanus we see two sides of the question, both of  
 which are justifiable. The plebeians have a legitimate argu-  
 ment. They have a right to receive their share of all goods.  
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"...after us to punish and their storyhouses  
 crowded with grain...passed that way who come  
 not established against the rich...If the wars  
 eat us not up, they will; and there's all the  
 love they bear us."

The commoners have a right to expect proper political rule,  
 but their counsel gives them nothing but abuse.  
 Still, such arguments, though justifiable, are (as we  
 have seen in the first chapter) not sufficient to overthrow  
 the selfish and stupid aristocracy. The courts they ask to  
 government into their own hands. The courts they ask to



redress their wrongs is denounced. It was made clear in the first chapter that no matter what rights the people have, they cannot take things into their own hands in order to remedy the situation because in so doing they must overthrow the legitimate and recognized authority. The people are not qualified by nature or by God to interfere with the "specialty of rule." As Menenius intimated, the feet cannot replace the head; likewise, the commoner cannot supplant the aristocrat in governing.

Tolstoy in a bitter denunciation of Shakespeare states, "The subject of Shakespeare's pieces, as is seen from the demonstrations of his greatest admirers, is the lowest, most vulgar view of life, which regards the external elevation of the lords of the world as a genuine distinction, despises the crowd, i.e., (sic) the working classes..."<sup>44</sup> Tolstoy uses Gervinus and Brandes, two "of his [Shakespeare's] greatest admirers"<sup>45</sup> as demonstrators of this barrage. He says "In order thus to accept all, one should understand that, according to Shakespeare's teaching, it is stupid and harmful for the individual to revolt against, or endeavor to overthrow, the limits of established religious and state forms"<sup>46</sup> In a bitter tirade against Shakespeare he continues by quoting Gervinus: "Shakespeare would abhor an independent and free individual who, with a powerful spirit, should struggle against all

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44. Leo Tolstoy, Tolstoy on Shakespeare, p. 93.

45. Idem.

46. Ibid., p. 93.

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 ... as their wrong is denoted. It was made clear in the  
 first chapter that no matter what rights the people have, they  
 cannot take things into their own hands in order to remedy the  
 situation because in so doing they must overthrow the legislative  
 and recognized authority. The people are not justified by  
 nature or by law to interfere with the "sovereignty of the law."  
 As Menenius is indicated, the law cannot replace the head; like-  
 wise, the commoner cannot supplant the aristocrat in governing.  
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 "The subject of Shakespeare's choice, as it were from the  
 demonstration of his greatest authority, is the lowest, most  
 vulgar view of life, which regards the external elevation  
 of the lords of the world as a genuine distinction, besides  
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 "devils and devils, two of his (Shakespeare's) greatest  
 subjects" 45 as demonstrators of this tragedy. He says "In  
 order that we should not be misled, one should understand that, according  
 to Shakespeare's teaching, it is stupid and harmful for the  
 individual to revolt against, or endeavor to overthrow, the  
 kings of established religions and social forms" 46 In a bitter  
 tirade against Shakespeare he continues by quoting Gervinus:  
 "Shakespeare would show an independent and free individual  
 who, with a powerful spirit, should struggle against all

44. Leo Tolstoy, Tolstoy on Shakespeare, p. 2.  
 45. Ibid.  
 46. Ibid., p. 97.



convention in politics...and overstep that union between religion and the state which has for thousands of years supported society." <sup>47</sup> With one exception this statement, cynically made by Tolstoy, is true, I take exception to the wording "according to his teaching."

Shakespeare's attitude toward the people in this regard is not inconsistent with the attitude current in his day. We have previously seen that as regards rule Shakespeare's attitude toward the commoners was the thought idiom of his day. Thomas Floyd wrote in 1600 "Wherefore there can be no greater daunger ensue, or happen to a Commonwealth, than to tollerate (sic) the rude, and common sort to rule..." <sup>48</sup> So in Shakespeare's drama are the people presented as unfit to rule. The term "many-headed multitude" is attributed in the play not only to Coriolanus but also to others. The Third Citizen in Act II, scene iii, cautions his companions against showing ingratitude toward Coriolanus, for "...[it would] make a monster of the multitude." <sup>49</sup> In elaborating on the term "many-headed multitude," this same citizen states why the plebeians are unqualified to rule. He states "...but that our wits are so diversely colour'd; and truly I think if all our wits were to issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west, ..." <sup>50</sup>

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47. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

48. Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

49. II, iii, 9-12.

50. II, iii, 19-26.

convention in politics...and overtook the union before  
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is not inconsistent with the attitude current in his day. We

have previously seen that as regards this Shakespeare's  
attitude toward the commoners was the typical idea of his day.  
Thomas Heywood wrote in 1600 "Wherefore should we be no greater  
than our fathers, or have to a commonwealth, than to collaborate  
(sic) the rule, and common sort to rule..." 47

Shakespeare's drama and the people presented as well to rule.  
The term "many-headed multitude" is attributed in the play not  
only to Coriolanus but also to others. The Third Citizen in  
Act II, scene III, cautions his companions against showing  
respect toward Coriolanus, for "...it would make a

monster of the multitude." 48 In referring to the term  
"many-headed multitude," this same citizen states why the  
citizens are unwilling to rule. He states "...but that our  
wits are so diversely coloured; and truly I think it all our  
wits were as issue out of one skull, they would fly east, west,

47. Ibid., p. 43.  
48. Ibid., p. 43.  
49. II, iii, 9-12.  
50. III, iii, 19-20.



The tribunes in the play Coriolanus are an innovation in the structure of the Roman state--a concession granted to the people. Menenius gives an accurate account of the type of leader the people, when allowed, will choose for themselves. Throughout the play, they appear to lack the wisdom and ability to lead. Menenius calls them "a brace of unmeriting, proud, violent, testy magistrates, alias fools, as any in Rome."<sup>51</sup> Their own words openly demonstrate that their actions against Coriolanus are powered by self-interest and not by an honest desire to aid their party.<sup>52</sup> Though the tribunes, through their conniving, are responsible for much of the political havoc in Rome; yet, basically, the very system which would allow the unqualified masses to act in any directive capacity is, in the eyes of sixteenth century critics, the evil to be curtailed or uprooted.

Coriolanus himself in the play repeatedly iterates that when these democratic forces are allowed to operate, the natural order is upset, confusion sets in, and the state ripens for eventual deterioration. For Coriolanus naturally speaks as would Shakespeare or one of his contemporaries who feel that the differences among men determined by nobility and wisdom cannot be ignored; authority endowed from above cannot be flouted or the state will perish. "Where gentry, title, wisdom, cannot conclude but by the yea and no of general

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51. II, i, 46-48.

52. II, i, 238.

The criticism in the play Coriolanus is an innovation in the structure of the Roman state--a conception created to the people. Menenius then an account of the type of leader the people, when allowed, will choose for themselves. Throughout the play, they seem to lack the wisdom and self-reliance. Menenius calls them "a brace of untearable, proud, violent, lusty, masterless, allies too, as any in Rome." Their own words only demonstrate that their actions against Coriolanus are governed by self-interest and not by an honest desire to rid their city. Though the criticism through their conduct, are responsible for much of the political havoc in Rome; yet, basically, the very system which would allow the unqualified masses to act in any directive capacity is, in the eyes of ancient comedy critics, the evil to be curbed or removed. Coriolanus himself in the play repeatedly iterates that when these democratic forces are allowed to operate, the natural order is upset, confusion reigns in, and the state means for eventual destruction. For Coriolanus naturally speaks as would Shakespeare or one of his contemporaries who feel that the differences among men determined by nobility and wisdom cannot be ignored; authority endowed from above cannot be flouted or the state will perish. "Where gentles, little wisdom, cannot conclude but by the yes and no of general

51. II. 1. 48-49.  
52. II. 1. 238.



ignorance" <sup>53</sup> no healthy society can thrive. Coriolanus felt that where the people participated in government, the authority became divided and the political body developed into an unruly monster of many heads with self destruction the usual result.

...when two authorities are up  
Neither supreme, how soon confusion  
May enter 'twixt the gap of both and take  
The one by the other. <sup>54</sup>

As we saw in the first chapter, the order of degrees, according to sixteenth century belief, cannot be molested or the welfare of the whole state will suffer.

Thus we see that the people in attempting to divert the natural course and to adopt political rule unsuited to them constitute a menace to the livelihood of the state.

Moulton believes that Coriolanus is the exemplification of devotion to principle and service to the state. Examples of valour and bravery against great odds are accredited to him and make him the hero of his age. <sup>55</sup> Yet he is not the vivacious, self-satisfied leader that Hotspur is, for Coriolanus hates praise, and, as it was said, he would rather go through the trying period of having his wounds re-heal than to hear how he received them, and would have nothing of reward. <sup>56</sup>

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53. III, i, 144-46.

54. III, i, 107-12.

55. Moulton, op. cit., p. 86.

56. II, ii, 73-79.

...no healthy society can survive. Coriolanus is a  
 that where the people participated in government, the authority  
 become divided and the political body developed into an unruly  
 monster of many heads with self destruction the usual result.

...when two authorities are up  
 either an even, how soon confusion  
 May enter in the eye of both and take  
 The one by the other.

As we saw in the first chapter, the order of degrees, according  
 to sixteenth century belief, cannot be violated or the welfare  
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Thus we see that the people in attempting to divert the  
 natural course and to adopt political rule united to cause  
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Monten believes that Coriolanus is the exemplification  
 of devotion to principle and service to the state. Examples  
 of valor and bravery against great odds are accredited to him  
 and make him the hero of his age. Yet he is not the

vicious, self-anointed leader that Montan is, for  
 Coriolanus makes peace, and as it was said, he would rather  
 go through the trying period of having his wounds re-heal  
 than to hear how he received them, and would have nothing of

7-11-11

53. 11. 1. 14-15.  
 54. 11. 1. 15-16.  
 55. 11. 1. 16-17.  
 56. 11. 1. 17-18.



He covets less  
 Than misery itself would give, rewards  
 His deeds with doing them, and is content  
 To spend the time to end it. <sup>57</sup>

Some critics think that the deeds of Coriolanus are not prompted by anything personal--service to the state is his sole motivation. The patricians encourage and persuade him to office and as he says he "would rather be their servant in his own way than sway with them in theirs." <sup>58</sup> In this respect Moulton sees nothing but injustice in the common interpretation, which in this drama sees pride and its fall. <sup>59</sup> This interpretation (mistake as Moulton sees it) is an obvious one, for "proud" is the epithet applied to Coriolanus throughout the story. Even his mother gives voice to this idea.

Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst  
 it from me,  
 But owe thy pride thyself. <sup>60</sup>

Moreover, scorn and mockery which definitely are connected with Coriolanus and which are usually associated with pride substantiate this idea. Yet, in conjunction with this approach, Moulton believes that if we force ourselves to regard the matter impersonally and to do justice to the story's hero, we cannot charge him with pride per se. Scorn, perhaps, is in this case the natural result of indignation which is justified because, continues Moulton, the plebeians demand food yet

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57. II, ii, 130.

58. II, i, 219.

59. Moulton, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

60. II, ii, 129.

He covers his  
Then misery itself would give, however  
His death with being there, and his content  
To spend the time to end it.

Some critics think that the deeds of Gortals are not  
promoted by anything personal--service to the state is his sole  
motivation. The natural an egoism and persuade him to  
office and as he says he "wants rather to be their servant in his  
own way than away with them in theirs." In this respect  
Monton sees nothing but injustice in the common interest-  
fection, which in this drama sees wide and the fact. This  
interposition (intended as Monton sees it) is an obvious one,  
for "Gortals" is the subject applied to Gortals from Mont  
the story. Even his mother gives voice to this idea.

Thy villainess was mine, then such has  
it from me,  
but own thy wife thyself.

Moreover, action and mockery which definitely are connected with  
Gortals and which are usually associated with wide an-  
standards this idea. Yet, in connection with this proposal,  
Monton believes that if we force ourselves to regard the  
right personally and to be justice to the society here, we  
cannot charge him with wide an-standards, for, in  
this case the required result of indignation which is justified  
because, continuing Monton, the Gortals demand food yet

77. 11, 11, 120.  
78. 11, 1, 210.  
79. Monton, op. cit., p. 119.  
80. 11, 11, 120.



shirk duty. Coriolanus will compromise in no way. He stands for principle pure and simple. Even his mother, as we shall see, often is infected with the spirit of compromise. With such complete contempt for half service, it is hard to associate Coriolanus with pride. <sup>61</sup>

But, to use a cliché, there are two sides to every story--the people are not entirely to blame, for their leader, Coriolanus, is not suited or qualified for rule. As Menenius intimated, the welfare of the state depends on the proper functioning of the governing head in its degree. Coriolanus being unaware of the responsibilities of the office he seeks is as responsible as the people for the chaos that engulfs Rome. Because of this unawareness of responsibilities and its connection to the whole state, as he is according to Renaissance standards unqualified to rule. Palmer states that Coriolanus cannot carry his honours even; he has the pride which ever taints the happy man, and a defect of judgement which makes it impossible for him to dispose wisely of his chances; he must forever be commanding peace with the same austerity and garb as he controlled war. <sup>62</sup>

Renaissance standards, as we have seen, demanded that governors rule with a certain amount of indulgence and love toward their subjects, that their major concern be the welfare of the whole state and not their own selfish ends. In short,

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61. Moulton, op. cit., p. 119.

62. Palmer, op. cit., p. 303.

which duty. Coriolanus will compare it to war. He stands  
 for extreme duty and sacrifice. Even his mother, as we shall  
 see, often is infected with the spirit of patriotism. With  
 such conditions combined for half service, it is hard to  
 associate Coriolanus with order. 61

But, to use a cliché, there are two sides to every story--  
 the people are not entirely to blame, for their leader,  
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 Agrippa said, the welfare of the state depends on the proper  
 functioning of the governing head in its duties. Coriolanus  
 being unaware of the responsibilities of the office he seeks  
 to be responsible as the people for the chaos that ensues.  
 Because of this unawareness of responsibilities and the  
 connection to the whole state, as he is according to  
 Menenius Agrippa, Coriolanus cannot carry his burdens even; he has the pride  
 which even stains the heavy man, and a defect of judgment  
 which makes it impossible for him to dispose wisely of his  
 chances; he must forever be commanding peace with the same  
 severity and pride as he controlled war. 62

Menenius Agrippa, as we have seen, demands that  
 governors rule with a certain amount of indulgence and love  
 toward their subjects, that their major concern be the welfare  
 of the whole state and not their own selfish ends. In short,



their attitude must be that of a doting father, punishing where needed, yet always acting in the best interests of his children.

Coriolanus then cannot rule--he is not qualified. "You must in no way say he is covetous," says the Second Citizen of Coriolanus.<sup>63</sup> Granted, he acts not in selfish interest, yet he acts not for the common welfare but towards satisfying his own pride. "...he did it to please his mother; and to be partly proud; which he is, even to the altitude of his virtue."<sup>64</sup> In the Arden Shakespeare we find that "Pride, the first of the seven deadly sins, is the more overmastering in Coriolanus unless wrath be excepted."<sup>65</sup> Palmer believes that Shakespeare is presenting not a hypocrite but a man, neither the first nor the last of his kind, who sincerely mistakes his love of personal glory and the impetus of his personal pride for devotion to the public service.<sup>66</sup> The Second Citizen is in agreement that he and his class are Coriolanus's major concern, not the welfare of the state as a whole.

Some critics say Coriolanus alone exemplifies purity of principle. All others in some form or other fall to the spirit of compromise. He alone seems to have and maintain the courage of his convictions. The patrician party in creating the office of tribune (exponent of the claims of the individual) show clearly that they lack the courage to carry forth, as does

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63. I, i, 43-45.

64. I, i, 36-41.

65. Arden Shakespeare, Coriolanus, p. xix.

66. Palmer, op. cit., p. 265.

their attitude must be that of a loving father, maintaining what  
needed, yet always acting in the best interests of his children.  
Gordianus then cannot rise--he is not qualified. "You  
must in no way say he is covetous," says the second citizen of  
Gordianus. "Granted, he acts not in selfish interest, yet  
he acts not for the common welfare and towards satisfying his  
own ends." "...he did it to please his mother; and to be partly  
second; which is it, even to the attitude of his virtue." 64  
in the other Shakespeare we find that "tride, the first of the  
seven deadly sins, is the most overmastering in Gordianus  
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is presenting not a hypocrite but a man, rather the first man  
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personal glory and the interest of his personal pride for  
devotion to the public service. 66 The second citizen is in  
agreement that he and his class are Gordianus's major concern,  
not the welfare of the state as a whole.  
Some critics say Gordianus alone represents a party of  
principals. All others in some form or other fall to the spirit  
of compromise. He alone seems to have and maintain the course  
of his conviction. The political party in creating the office  
of tribune (testament of the class of the individuals) show  
clearly that they lack the courage to carry forth, as does

63. I, 1, 43-45.  
64. I, 1, 38-41.  
65. *Arden Shakespeare*, Gordianus, p. xix.  
66. Palmer, *op. cit.*, p. 205.



Coriolanus, the torch of their political ideals. They might state that in so far as Coriolanus is concerned all is done in a spirit of patriotism and love of country. Love of country, however, involves deference and respect for all degrees, not just loyalty to one class--this quality is demanded of sixteenth century leaders.

Little is said specifically of Coriolanus' selfish class interest, but it is the logical implication of his notorious contempt for the common people. And in an aristocratic form of government, political action for the benefit of the privileged few is tantamount to political action for the selfish interests of the ruler. For an aristocracy by definition is a state governed by the privileged few.<sup>67</sup>

Thus the situation as found in Coriolanus is definitely tyrannical, a situation not condoned by sixteenth century political thought. According to sixteenth century theorists then, Coriolanus' bitter rebukes and condemnation for the actions and reprisals of the people are justified, for, as we have seen, they are not permitted to rise up--even though an injustice is being done--to take political matters into their own hands. It is not possible to ignore his pungent remarks: "Bid them wash their faces and keep their teeth clean."<sup>68</sup> Moulton corroborates the above belief by saying that this does not necessarily show aristocratic contempt, however, but may be the result of inner emotions which rebel against the insincere suggestions being urged upon him--namely, to flatter the

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67. Phillips, op. cit., p. 160.

68. II, iii, 67.

Coriolanus, the term of their political ideal. They might  
state that in so far as Coriolanus is concerned all is done in  
a spirit of patriotism and love of country. Love of country,  
however, involves self-interest and respect for all desires, not  
just love for one class--this quality is demanded of all men  
everywhere.

Little is said specifically of Coriolanus' self-interest, but it is the logical implication of his notorious contempt for the common people. And in an aristocratic sense of government, selfish motives for the benefit of the privileged few is contrasted to political motives for the selfish interests of the whole. For an aristocracy by definition is a state governed by the privileged few.

Thus the situation as found in Coriolanus is definitely

tyrannical, a situation not condoned by aristocratic political thought. According to aristocratic theory tyrants

then, Coriolanus, after failure and condemnation for the actions and repression of the people are justified, for, as we have seen, they are not permitted to rise up--even though an injustice is being done--to take political matters into their own hands. It is not possible to ignore the pungent remark:

"Let them wash their faces and keep their hands clean." 83

London correspondent the same is felt by seeing that this does not necessarily show aristocratic contempt; however, let us be the result of inner emotions which reveal against the leaders suggestions being urged upon him--namely, to leave the



people.<sup>69</sup> The remarks of two officers would seem to substantiate this idea. One of the two states that to affect the malice of the people is as bad as to flatter them for their love.<sup>70</sup> It might then follow that Coriolanus' contempt and criticism are not prompted by a feeling of aristocratic superiority or pride, but a complete adherence and subjection to principle which is opposed to compromise in any form. His is not a bitter hatred of the people but is merely a dislike for the dissenters.

I sometime lay here in Corioli  
At a poor man's house; he asked me kindly:  
He cried to me; I saw him prisoner:  
But then Aufidius was within my view,  
And wrath o'erwhelmed my pity:<sup>71</sup> I request you  
To give my poor host freedom.<sup>72</sup>

Moulton continues by stating that the conversation of the two officers ends with both apparently in agreement over the fact that Coriolanus has regard only for the country--that is, the state. All his aims can well be said to center around the thought of service.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, Coriolanus' disregard for the people, their rights, their degrees, does render him unfit to rule, for he is not the tender, guiding father of his flock--a quality demanded of all governing forces. This is not an idle conjecture for the plebeians themselves are well aware of this fact and consider him "a very dog to the commonalty."<sup>73</sup>

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69. Moulton, op. cit., p. 119.

70. II, ii, 21-23.

71. I, x, 83-88.

72. Moulton, op. cit., p. 119.

73. I, i, 28.

people. 52 The remarks of two officers would seem to substantiate this idea. One of the officers stated that he had the notice of the president as far as to restrict them for their love. 53 It might then follow that Cortés, according to criticism are not presented by a feeling of aristocratic superiority or pride, but a complete abstinence and subjection to discipline which is opposed to conventional in any form. His is not a bitter hatred of the people but is merely a dislike for the dissensions.

I sometimes say here in Cortés:  
At a poor man's house; he asked me kindly:  
He cried to me; I saw him prisoner;  
And when nothing was within my view,  
And much distressed by pity; I begged you  
To give my poor host freedom.

Notice continued by stating that the conversation of the two officers ends with both apparently in agreement over the fact that Cortés was regarded only for the country--that is, the state. All this can well be said to center around the thought of service. 54 Nevertheless, Cortés' disregard for the people, their rights, their desires, does render him unfit to rule, for he is not the ruler, holding fast to the clock-a quality demanded of all governing leaders. This is not an idle conjecture for the relations between men are well aware of this fact and consider his very dog to the community. 55

60. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 119.  
61. 11, 12, 13-14.  
62. 1, 2, 3, 4-5.  
63. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 119.  
64. 1, 1, 2, 3.



Even praise for his military prowess is reserved for want of this quality. "I say, if he would incline to the people, there was never worthier man," says the Third Citizen.<sup>74</sup> "You have been a scourge to her enemies, you have been a rod to her friends; you have not indeed loved the common people," reiterated the Fourth Citizen.<sup>75</sup> Again in Act II the First Officer states that Coriolanus is "vengeance proud, and loves not the common people."<sup>76</sup> Junius Brutus, a tribune of selfish and base motives wisely picks at this apparent flaw in Coriolanus' political make-up.

We must suggest the people in what hatred  
He still hath held them;...he would  
Have made them mules, silenc'd their  
pleaders and  
Disproportioned their freedoms, holding them,...<sup>77</sup>

Menenius feels this weakness in Coriolanus to be apparent, and he exhorts him to remedy the situation or at least to feign regard for the people primarily because the welfare of the state, with which he is ever and always concerned, to be at stake. Adopting the tone of Coriolanus for its possible persuasive benefits, Menenius says:

Before he should thus stoop to the herd, but that  
The violent fit o' the time craves it as physic  
For the whole state, I would put mine armour on  
Which I can scarcely bear.<sup>78</sup>

His plea falls on deaf ears, for Coriolanus, the military

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- 74. II, iii, 42.
  - 75. II, iii, 97.
  - 76. II, ii, 6.
  - 77. II, i, 258-61.
  - 78. III, ii, 32-35.





arm of the state, is unsuited mentally to comply with such a request. He is primarily and solely a military man. In this respect a leader, but in no other. Only in a military way can he be of service to Rome. This fact is indicated when Coriolanus in response to his mother's anticipatory remarks regarding the possibilities of his obtaining the governorship makes this statement (which Moulton cited as an example of the injustice of attributing pride to Coriolanus)

Know, good mother,  
I had rather be their servant in my way  
Than sway with them in theirs. 79

Menenius gives voice to this military inclination of Coriolanus'

Consider further  
That when he speaks not like a citizen  
You find him like a soldier. Do not take  
His vulgar accents for malicious sounds  
But, as I say, such as become a soldier... 80

Finally, in a summation of the character of Coriolanus, Aufidius states:

First he was  
A noble servant to them, but he could not  
Carry his honours even. Whether it was pride  
...whether defect of judgement...  
...or whether nature  
Not to other than one thing...but commanding  
peace  
Even with the same austerity and garb  
As he controll'd the war. 81

Here we find represented all the defects, to each of which I have referred previously--the pride of Coriolanus which

79. II, i, 218-20.

80. III, iii, 52-59.

81. IV, vii, 35-48.

one of the state, is understood mainly to comply with such a  
request. He is primarily and solely a military man. In this  
respect a leader, and in no other. Only in a military way can  
he be of service to Rome. This fact is indicated when  
Cicero in response to his brother's unexpected remarks  
regarding the possibility of his obtaining the governorship  
makes this statement (which Mardon cited as an example of the  
injustice of scrutinizing words to Cicero's)

I had rather be kept silent in my way  
than away with words in theirs.

Memorandum gives notes to this military inscription of

Cicero's

Consider further  
That when he speaks not like a citizen  
You find him like a soldier. Do not take  
his vulgar accents for malicious sounds  
but, as I say, such as become a soldier...

Finally, in a suggestion of the character of Cicero's

Antisthenes states:

Thus he was  
A noble servant to Rome, but he could not  
Carry his honest sword. Whether he was pride  
... whether he was of judgment...  
... or whether he was  
Not so other than one thing... not considering  
Even with the same austerity and zeal  
As he controlled the war.

Here we find represented all the defects, to each of which I  
have referred previously--the pride of Cicero's which

79. II, 1, 15-20.  
80. III, 11, 15-20.  
81. IV, 11, 35-40.



continually eclipses the general welfare of the state; his lack of judgement in undertaking the responsibilities of his position.

While Coriolanus insists continually on his hereditary privileges and regards as an act of rebellion any attempt on the part of the plebeians to challenge the established order, he is prepared to over-ride any tradition that runs counter to his disposition. Prior to the time of election he utters a sentiment entirely destructive of any system of law based on precedent:

What custom wills in all things shall we do't  
The dust on antique time would lie unswept  
And mountainous error be too highly heap'd  
For truth to o'er-peer. <sup>82</sup>

The contempt of Coriolanus for the people is rooted neither in concern for his country, nor in allegiance to an ordered system of government, which he is prepared to reject if it does not please him.

We see, then, that the entire political society of Rome fails to conform to the principles of order and degree. The plebeians in attempting to better their position and to exercise political authority for which they are not equipped forsake their degree and stratified level. The governors, especially Coriolanus, fail to fulfill the responsibilities of their position. Order and proportion are thus destroyed, and the purpose for which the individual was ordained cannot be achieved. The result was inevitable--sickness followed by

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82. II, iii, 121-24.

continually follows the general welfare of the state; his lack of judgment in undertaking the responsibilities of his position

While Corbin's position is certainly on his necessity  
activities and regards as an act of rebellion any attempt on  
the part of the electors to challenge the established order;  
he is prepared to over-ride any tradition that runs counter to  
his disposition. Prior to the time of election he views a  
sentiment entirely destructive of any system of law based on

disobedience:

What reason will in all things shall we do?  
The duty on another side would be answer  
and mountainous error be too highly need  
For truth be other-ness. 82

The content of Corbin's for the results is rooted neither in  
concern for his country, nor in allegiance to an ordered system  
of government, which he is prepared to reject if it does not  
please him.

We see, then, that the entire political society of some  
fails to conform to the principles of order and decorum. The  
electors in attempting to better their position and to  
exercise political authority for which they are not equipped  
forbear their desire and stratified level. The governors,  
especially Corbin, fail to fulfill the responsibilities of  
their position. Order and propriety are thus destroyed, and  
the purpose for which the individual was ordained cannot be  
achieved. The result was inevitable--disobedience followed by



eventual death.

Disruption within the state when the natural order has been shunned usually takes one of two forms--civil upheaval or foreign invasion.<sup>83</sup> In each case the threat is the direct result of unnatural political order.

The first results in Rome of violation of the natural law are represented by civil disorder. In Act III the ambition of the plebeians and tribunes and Coriolanus' scorn for the people operate against each other for the first time. Claims to political authority heighten the contempt of Coriolanus for the people and his subsequent denunciations--showing the antipathy of the leader--incite the people to further political violence. Civil peace and order soon vanish and the political structure collapses.

The comments of Menenius prove a reliable guide in analyzing this scene. The entire purpose of his plea to the people is for them to act in conformity with their degree so that the state will survive. He does not make assertions that the people have no grievances or that Coriolanus has no cause for contempt. His only concern is that they lay aside their differences for the welfare of the state. "On both sides more respect," he says.<sup>84</sup> Later he indicates that unless normal order is existent Rome will be ruined by civil turmoil.

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83. Phillips, op. cit., p. 165.

84. III, i, 181.





Proved by process  
 Lest parties, as he is belov'd, break out  
 And sack great Rome with Romans.<sup>85</sup>

Menenius attempts to persuade Coriolanus to recognize his responsibilities, but unlike Volumnia, who suggests compromise because of personal ambition, he is motivated solely by the welfare of the state. As mentioned previously, "...the time craves it as physic..." For the time being he restores order. He persuades the people to allow authority to remain in qualified hands and Coriolanus to simulate the political quality he asks. Thus is the first crisis avoided.

The ambition of the people and the contempt of Coriolanus again assert themselves and in Act IV, scene iii, Rome is again threatened. Destruction formerly threatened from within; now now with the banishment of Coriolanus, destruction threatens from without. Internal dissension has so weakened the state that it is an easy victim for any invader. The Volscres upon learning "There hath been in Rome strange insurrections...hope to come upon them in the heat of their division."<sup>86</sup> Civil strife is obviously their reason for launching an attack.

Menenius and Cominius from their remarks regard the approaching invasion as the result of civil disorder. The tribunes, they feel, because of their subversive activities, are to blame. Says Cominius:

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85. III, i, 314-16.

86. IV, iii, 16-19.

proved by process  
least partly, as he is told, "I am not  
and such great Rome with Rome."

Memoranda attempts to persuade Coriolanus to recognize his  
responsibilities, but unlike Volturnus, who suggests compromise  
because of personal ambition, he is motivated solely by the  
welfare of the state. As mentioned previously, "...the time  
craves it as a victim..." For the time being he remains order.  
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strife is obviously their reason for learning an attack.  
Volturnus and Coriolanus from their former regard the  
approaching invasion as the result of civil disorder. The  
Volturnus, they feel, because of their conservative activities,  
are to blame. Says Coriolanus:

52. III, I, 314-16.  
53. IV, III, 18-19.



You have brought  
A trembling upon Rome, such as was never  
So incapable of help. 87

Menenius bitterly says to the tribunes:

You have made good work,  
You and your...men; you that stood so much  
Upon the voice of occupation and  
The breath of garlic eaters. 88

He blames not only those who rebelled but also the weakness of the authority which allowed it. As regards the banishment of Coriolanus, he says:

...We lov'd him; but like beasts  
And cowardly nobles, gave way unto your  
clusters,  
Who did hoot him out o' the city. 89

This crisis then was caused by the negligence of all degrees in performing their proper duties.

The theme of the entire play showed that the order and degree prescribed by God and natural law cannot be ignored nor tampered with, for in so doing the political rhythm of the state and the welfare of its people are threatened and destroyed. The fall of the tribunes, who are finally thrown out by the plebeians, drags down with them the democratic procedure which they inaugurated and represented. The influence of Coriolanus is also ended principally by those qualities which rendered him incapable to rule--pride and impatience--and not because, as Moulton believed, he found it necessary to make a choice between principle and compromise.

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87. IV, vi, 81-83; 118-20.

88. IV, vi, 95-98.

89. IV, vi, 125-28.





and choosing compromise Coriolanus, the exponent and exemplar of principle, found ruin inevitable.<sup>90</sup>

This drama, says Phillips, is a clash between passion and reason, reason being the political philosophy which lies in every scene, passion being the pride which most critics have recognized to be the tragic flaw in the character of Coriolanus. He is unable to act in conformity with the pattern and purpose of the state.<sup>91</sup> Coriolanus justifiably criticizes the political activity of the plebeians, but he is unable to see that he is a direct cause of this activity. He is also unable to see clearly his role as a leader, the obligations of a father which it entails. The uprising is a result of his conduct and attitude. In Coriolanus, the action of the governing class is symbolized. Pride blinds his reasoning and causes a chaotic situation in Rome which leads to his own downfall.

It was the opinion of the first group of critics that Shakespeare had no sympathy with the lower classes, and that he delights in holding them up to ridicule. It should seem odd to those who find in this play evidence of Shakespeare's contempt for the people that he goes out of his way, in scene after scene, to show us plain citizens and soldiers speaking more wisely than their magistrates.

To those intent on finding anti-democratic bias in Shakespeare, the speeches of Sicinius, Menenius and Brutus are

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90. Moulton, op. cit., p. 122.

91. Phillips, op. cit., p. 170.

and choosing convenient Corollaries, the argument and examples  
of Aristotle, being truly inevitable.

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reason, reason being the political philosophy which lies in

every scene, passion being the spirit which each crisis have

recognized to be the tragic flaw in the character of Coriolanus.

He is unable to act in conformity with the passion and purpose

of the state. Mr. Coriolanus justifiably resisters the

political activity of the state, but he is unable to see

that he is a direct cause of this activity. He is also unable

to see clearly his role as a leader, the obligation of a

leader, which is essential. The uprising is a result of his con-

duct and attitude. In Coriolanus, the action of the governing

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It was the opinion of the first group of critics that

Shakespeare had no sympathy with the lower classes, and that he

believed in holding them up as ridiculous. It should now add to

those who find in this play evidence of Shakespeare's contempt

for the people that he goes out of his way, in scene after

scene, to show us plain citizens and soldiers speaking more

wisely than their masters.

To those intent on finding anti-democratic bias in

Shakespeare, the speeches of Bruto, Menenius and Titus are



worth noting. The patricians fearful of invasion think mainly of themselves while the tribunes plead for Rome, urging the senators to forget their feud and think of the common peril.

Men: What should I do?  
 Brutus: Only make trial what your love can do  
 For Rome, towards Marcius  
 Men: Well, and say that Marcius  
 Return me, as Cominius is return'd,  
 Unheard: what then?  
 But as a discontented friend, grief-shot  
 Sicinius: Yet your good will  
 Must have that thanks from Rome,  
 after the measure<sup>92</sup>  
 As you intended well.

Surely the commonweal is here portrayed in a favorable light.

The sneers of Coriolanus are assumed by some critics to be the expression of Shakespeare's contempt for his poorer brethren in England. Shakespeare no doubt agreed with many of the things his puppet Coriolanus said of the Roman crowd, for occasionally they ran counter to sixteenth century beliefs. But from this to supposing that he had discriminated between this crowd and that group to which Coriolanus belonged is a long step of snobbish and fallacious reasoning that we have no right to assume Shakespeare at all likely to have taken. Shakespeare depicted the crowd as they really were; their actions as a crowd or mob are often deserving of ridicule. As individuals they are presented as good fellows, for as individuals they do not seek to leave their stratified level and function out of degree by assuming authority. Thus

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92. V, i, 39-49.





Shakespeare's feeling towards the mob was prompted by their complete indifference to the principles of sixteenth century political society. They tried to assume authority for which they were unqualified.

Care for us! True indeed! They ne'er  
cared for us yet,--suffer us to famish,  
and their store-houses crammed with  
grain,...repeal daily any wholesome act  
established against the rich, and provide  
more piercing statutes daily to chain up  
and restrain the poor. If the war eat us  
not up, they will; and there's all the  
love they bear us. 93

These lines spoken by one of the commoners (whom Shakespeare is supposed to hate) are as much Shakespeare as are the derogatory remarks of Coriolanus. Obviously then, Shakespeare did not write on a tone of class-prejudice. He showed all individuals as they adhered to or flouted sixteenth century beliefs.

In Coriolanus the citizens become a mob because of the insufferable behaviour of Coriolanus. This behaviour, even of a mob, does not compare at all unfavorably with that of the senatorial party. John Palmer says, "There is no evidence in this play that Shakespeare hated the people unless we all enter into the strange assumption that Caius Marcius Coriolanus speaks for the author." 94 Coriolanus hated the people, but to attribute his derogatory, embittered speeches--in which he certainly reveals a conspicuous lack of judgment and humanity--

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93. I, i, 80-87.

94. Palmer, op. cit., p. 315.

Shakespeare's feeling towards the mob was expressed by their complete indifference to the principles of sixteenth century political society. They tried to assume authority for which they were unqualified.

Love for us, Time and death! They never  
 turned for us, yet still we are the same,  
 and their scorn-humors changed with  
 their... present daily the whole scene and  
 established against the rich, and provide  
 a new playing station daily to challenge  
 and reverse the foot. In the air and us  
 not us, only us; and there, all the  
 love they bear us. 93

These lines speak of one of the components (whom Shakespeare is supposed to have) who as much Shakespeare as the the derogatory remarks of Coriolanus. Obviously then, Shakespeare did not write on a tone of class-prejudice. He showed all individuals as they adhered to or flouted Elizabethan society beliefs.

In Coriolanus the citizens become a mob because of the inhuman behavior of Coriolanus. This behavior, even at a mob, does not compare at all unfavorably with that of the senatorial party. John Palmer says, "There is no evidence in this play that Shakespeare hated the people unless we will enter into the extreme assumption that Coriolanus Coriolanus speaks for the people." 94 Coriolanus hated the people, but he extracted his derogatory, unflattering remarks--in which he certainly reveals a consciousness of the human and humanity--



to the heart of Shakespeare is definitely wrong.

Those who attempt to identify Shakespeare with his characters in an effort to demonstrate his political beliefs would do well to compare his play carefully with that of Plutarch--its historical source. Plutarch's Roman citizens do not show the forbearance in the face of insult that is characteristic of the same group in Shakespeare's work. Shakespeare presents the conduct of the citizens in a better light; they are more calculated to secure the sympathy of the spectator.<sup>95</sup> Obviously then Shakespeare was not prejudiced. He wrote of the tragedy of a man whose contempt for the people was great, whose pride offended justice and fair dealing and made him unfit to rule. Hence, the speeches of Coriolanus simply reveal his arrogance and should not be considered political truths.

Coriolanus is definitely not a play to exhibit the virtues and destinies of the aristocrat. It is a play about a conventional military hero, existing as a characteristic symbol of a strong aristocratic system. Shakespeare was neither for nor against him. He was quite ready to show displeasure with the activities of the mob and he was also ready to examine with equal impartiality the child of a harsh, practical system, abusing his many advantages, and showing to perfection how the nobles as well as the crowd are at times unsatisfactory and

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95. Ibid., p. 317.





foolish, the one very nearly worthy of the other--the violent, conceited leader, and the resentful, heedless mob.

If we regard Coriolanus not merely with respect to the many, but if we analyze his character in itself, we must confess that personified aristocracy is here represented in its noblest and in its worst light, with that impartiality which Shakespeare as a dramatist can scarcely avoid.





## CONCLUSION

In the plays here discussed Shakespeare examines history for evidence on political concepts which he held in common with the majority of his contemporaries. Order, degree, vocation, and the specialty of rule--these are the elements which form the philosophical structure of the dramas.

In Henry V, Shakespeare's hero king, we saw the sixteenth century principles of order, degree, and vocation upheld and both factions (aristocratic and plebeian) of civil society presented favorably. In Henry VI a weak king, unsuited to rule according to all prevailing standards, through his very inaction causes civil chaos. The mob of Cade in open rebellion and violating accepted principles feels the pain of their wrongdoings. Dissension is prevalent everywhere; hence the entire structure is shaken. If Shakespeare were inspired by an anti-democratic spirit, if he detested the people, as some say he did, why does Shakespeare present Cade with no ill feeling whatsoever? Cade is an ignorant imposter; yet Shakespeare apparently prefers his company to that of the Duke of York. In Richard III a tyrant king works havoc, and order is restored by its very exemplification--Richmond. In King John the grades of society are not paraded. We view a king, one of England's worst, who proves conclusively his unfitness for rule. In Coriolanus democracy is tried and found wanting, for it fails





to conform to the principles of political organization ordained by universal law. Degree is violated. Violent pride in Coriolanus and subversive democratic activities on the part of the masses unqualified to rule bring the entire state to the point of destruction. Famous critics have here found their strongest evidence that Shakespeare had a hatred for the people. In reality, Shakespeare in the play seems to have had a leaning to the arbitrary side of the question. Coleridge's remark, already mentioned, regarding the impartiality of Shakespeare's politics is here apropos. In Coriolanus the citizens are goaded into becoming a mob by the provocation of their leaders and the wicked behavior of Coriolanus himself. Their behavior, even as a mob, does not compare at all unfavorably with that of the senatorial party. There is no evidence in this play that Shakespeare hated the people unless we strongly feel that Coriolanus speaks for the author. The speeches in which Coriolanus condemns the people are intended to reveal the arrogance of the speaker and are not statements of political truth. Coriolanus certainly hated the people and that is why he came to a bad end. In Julius Caesar aristocracy is in turn rejected because it, likewise, failed to conform to sixteenth century principles. Unitary sovereignty is disregarded with disastrous results for all. We saw how an assembly of citizens individually decent was transformed into a brutal and senseless mob. That Shakespeare was inspired with a feeling of hate against the people because he exhibited

to conform to the principles of political organization ordained by universal law. Justice is violated. Right is denied in Coriolanus and subversive democratic activities on the part of the masses are justified to bring the entire state to the point of destruction. Famous critics have found their strongest evidence that Shakespeare had a hatred for the people. In reality, Shakespeare in the play seems to have had a feeling for the arbitrary side of the question. Coriolanus's remark, already mentioned, regarding the impartiality of Shakespeare's politics is very proper. In Coriolanus the citizens are regarded that recorded a note by the prosecution of their leaders and the wicked behavior of Coriolanus himself. Their behavior, even as a mob, does not compare at all unfavorably with that of the senatorial party. There is no evidence in this play that Shakespeare hated the people unless we strongly feel that Coriolanus speaks for the author. The speeches in which Coriolanus condemns the people are intended to reveal the arrogance of the speaker and are not statements of political truth. Coriolanus certainly hated the people and that is why he came to a bad end. In John Caesar aristocracy is in turn rejected because it, likewise, failed to conform to sixteenth century principles. Uniting sovereignty is disregarded with disastrous results for all. We say now an assembly of citizens individually devoted was transformed into a brutal and senseless mob. That Shakespeare was inspired with a feeling of hate against the people because he exhibited



a mob behaving like a mob does not follow. Even though you dislike a mob, you do not necessarily dislike the people who have been turned into a mob. As Palmer remarks, Shakespeare is never angry with the mob but hugely content with holding up its absurdities to its face.<sup>1</sup>

In these last two plays Rome moves slowly toward monarchy, the form of government which the sixteenth century considered divinely authorized. In all these plays we see the disastrous consequences when one of the degrees in the integrated structure forsakes its vocation and disrupts the whole system. There is a violation of the principles which Shakespeare held to be fundamental truths of political conduct.

Shakespeare did not reserve a warm corner in his heart for his kings, for in writing these histories he undoubtedly reached the conclusion among other things that history is a record of mankind's follies. It should be fairly obvious that Coriolanus or any of the other nobles are certainly not the heroes or the objects of admiration, for Shakespeare, that they are often considered to be.

As a dramatist, his remarks would not, as is often mentioned, be addressed to the "rotten-breathed" of his audience, the many-headed multitude, only. The crowd of his more elegant clients were "many-headed" too. Their breath probably did not smell especially sweet to the author.

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1. Palmer, op. cit., p. 315.

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As a dramatist, his remarks would not, as is often mentioned, be addressed to the "golden-haired" of his audience, the many-headed multitude, only. The crowd of his more elegant clients were "many-headed" too. Their speech probably did not sound especially sweet to the author.



One of the major causes for this misconstrued opinion regarding Shakespeare's so-called political bias is the fact that critics strove to adapt Shakespeare so much to their own time that they force him out of his.

In the words of Tillyard, Shakespeare expressed successfully in a total sequence of his plays a universally held and still comprehensible scheme of history, a scheme by which events evolve under a law of justice and under the ruling of God's Providence. The scheme, which, in its general outline, consisted of the distortion of nature's course by a crime and its restoration through a series of disasters and sufferings and struggles.<sup>2</sup>

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\_\_\_\_\_, *The Lion and the Fox*, New York and London, 1927.

2. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 350.

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In the words of Tillyard, Shakespeare expressed  
 essentially in a total sequence of his plays a universal and  
 and a total comprehensive scheme of history, a scheme by which  
 events evolve under a law of justice and under the reign of  
 God's Providence. The scheme, which, in its general outline,  
 consisted of the destruction of nature's power by a crime  
 and its restoration through a series of disasters and  
 sufferings and struggles.



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## ABSTRACT

The literature of the sixteenth century presented the state as a structure established by God or by natural reason, designed for the common good of all its members, governed by a sovereign authority, and composed of functionally determined ranks and degrees, each of which, performing its appointed task, contributed to the welfare of the whole. The majority at the time accepted this general pattern of the state. Unanimously, they acknowledged monarchy as essential to the structure of the state, obedience as essential to its successful operation, and common justice as its aim and purpose.

Occasionally, a king claiming absolute authority met with opposition designed to limit his power. Thus rose the adherents of restricted monarchy, and the right of rebellion.

Political society is pictured as a stratified body with various classes or degrees, determined by vocation, ruled over by a single authority, and working in harmony for the welfare of the whole state. Order and degree in the sixteenth century was recognized as the foundation of human society. Order exists only with a difference in degree, they felt. Thus was Renaissance theory based on the assumption that all men are not created equal. On the basis of these inequalities men are divided into distinct classes. Obedience to the king was an absolute necessity, for it was considered essential that each

## ABSTRACT

The literature of the sixteenth century presented the state as a structure established by God or by natural reason, destined for the common good of all its members, governed by a sovereign authority, and composed of functionally separated ranks and degrees, each of which, performing its appointed task, contributed to the welfare of the whole. The majority at the time accepted this general pattern of the state. Unanimously, they acknowledged monarchy as essential to the structure of the state, obedience as essential to its successful operation, and common justice as its aim and purpose. Occasionally, a king claiming absolute authority met with opposition designed to limit his power. Thus rose the doctrine of restricted monarchy, and the right of rebellion. Political society is pictured as a stratified body with various classes or degrees, determined by vocation, ruled over by a single authority, and working in harmony for the welfare of the whole state. Order and degree in the sixteenth century was recognized as the foundation of human society. Order exists only with a difference in degree, they felt. There was no difference theory based on the assumption that all men are not created equal. On the basis of these idealizations men are divided into distinct classes. Obedience to the king was an absolute necessity, for it was considered essential that each



individual adhere to the established order, only thus would the ultimate welfare of the state and the individual be brought about.

Aristocracy and democracy were considered in the sixteenth century and were found wanting--the sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of monarchy.

It is highly probable that men such as Hall, Polydore Virgil, and others and works such as A Mirror for Magistrates, Sir Thomas More, and Woodstock exerted influence upon the historical writings of Shakespeare. Most likely Shakespeare derived many of his ideas on history from these sources.

The Book of Homilies of the English Church was a popular source for the dissemination of ideas regarding obedience. It was generally felt that it was better to obey a bad king than to invite civil war. In the Mirror for Magistrates as in the Homilies, the question of loyalty was pertinent. The Mirror stated that rebellion was permissible against a king who orders a crime committed, against a usurper, or against a tyrant.

In his plays Shakespeare examines history on the basis of the principles which we have just discussed, namely, order, degree, and vocation. He describes all people in so far as they conform to or reject these standards. As a result because of inadequate knowledge of these basic principles many have accused Shakespeare of prejudice and bias.

In the play Henry V Shakespeare depicts a hero king, the incarnation of all that is right and good. In Henry's reign,





though a war exists, civil peace is the prevailing theme. Order, degree, and vocation are upheld by all groups, and all subjects are presented favorably.

The play Henry VI shows us a weak king who according to these accepted principles or standards is unfit to rule. An uprising of the citizens under the leadership of the foolish Jack Cade openly flouts existing order, and civil chaos, confusion, and death result. The group under Cade adopts the aspects of a mob and acts like a mob. Shakespeare describes them as such for which he is wrongly accused of bias. These people have violated the principles which the majority considered worthy of upholding--they are out of order.

Richard III presents to us a tyrant king. He stops at nothing to achieve his ends. As expected, civil disorder results. Justified rebellion ultimately takes place and order is once more restored under a worthy ruler, Richmond.

In King John we see what perhaps is England's worst king, a king absolutely unqualified to rule. Shakespeare's failure in this play to mention the Magna Carta causes critics to utter once again the unjust cry, "prejudice." Shakespeare did not at the time appreciate the importance of the Magna Carta; in fact, it is felt with justification that he was hardly aware of its existence.

In Julius Caesar we again see sixteenth century principles disregarded. Brutus and the others violating unitary sovereignty, as represented by Caesar, caused all the social and political





ills. Mob activity, incited into movement by Antony, is once again seen as a brutal and senseless force. Naturally, Shakespeare despised the mob as such, but he had not bias nor felt any bitterness for the people individually, distinct.

The play Coriolanus offers the critics their greatest opportunity to toy with the idea of Shakespeare's anti-democratic attitude. This play demonstrates that under prevailing beliefs and conditions democracy was not the ideal form of government. Degree is violated as is subsequently civil order. The pride of Coriolanus which, to say the least, causes him to act unwisely, is displayed with all its violent force. The subversive efforts of the citizens, who again adopt the guise of the mob, to undertake authority and power for which they are definitely unqualified is likewise vividly presented by Shakespeare. As a result of both wrongs, the state suffers. The order and degree prescribed by God cannot be ignored.

The activity of the plebeians is justifiably criticized, but Coriolanus is also presented as a figure incapable to rule because of the qualities of pride and impatience. The uprising is a result of his conduct and attitude. There is definitely no evidence in this play that Shakespeare hated the people. Both the aristocratic and the common people are here presented in an unfavorable light. The story of Coriolanus could only be treated in such a fashion as to have that enemy of his country the supreme figure of the history. Shakespeare had no choice.





He could not but make the tribunes base. And he certainly has not glorified their opponents beyond the requisite measure of equity and dramatic need. The actions and remarks of some of the nobles are as obviously hateful and contemptible to Shakespeare as even the rampant and raging malignity of the mob.

Shakespeare held certain principles to be fundamental truths of political conduct. He presented honestly and impartially all individuals as they adhered to or violated these standards.

He could not make the argument here, and he certainly has not afforded time or opportunity beyond the present measure of unity and dramatic need. The action and language of some of the poems are so obviously partial and contradictory to Shakespeare as even the language and feeling of the work. Shakespeare held certain principles to be fundamental truths of political conduct. He presented history and literature all individuals as they appear to or violated these standards.



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